

DOUBLE VISION:
REDRESSING THEO SCHOON'S ABSENCE
FROM NEW ZEALAND ART HISTORY

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CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Chapter 1: The Enigma of Theo Schoon	1
Chapter 2: Schoon's Early Life in South-East Asia 1915-1927	17
Chapter 3: Schoon in Europe 1927-1935	25
Chapter 4: Return to the Dutch East-Indies: The Bandung Period 1936-1939	46
Chapter 5: The First Decade in New Zealand 1939-1949	63
Chapter 6: The 1950s-1960s and the Legacy	91
Chapter 7: Conclusion	111
List of Illustrations	116
Appendix 1 Selective List of Articles Published on Māori Rock Art 1947 - 1949	141
Appendix 2 The Life of Theo Schoon: A Chronology	142
Bibliography	146

ABSTRACT

The thesis will examine the apparent absence of the artist Theo Schoon (Java 1915 – Sydney 1985) from the accepted canon of New Zealand art history, despite his relationship with some of its most notable artists, including Colin McCahon, Rita Angus and Gordon Walters.

The thesis will also readdress Schoon's importance to the development of modernist art in New Zealand and Australia, through a detailed examination of his life, his development as an artist (with particular attention to his life in the Dutch East-Indies, and his training in Rotterdam, Netherlands), and his influence over New Zealand's artistic community.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ENIGMA OF THEO SCHOON

Schoon's Position in New Zealand Art

On 14 July 1985, Theodorus Johannes Schoon (figs. 1-3) died destitute at the age of seventy, from emphysema, in the Prince of Wales Public Hospital, Randwick, Sydney. He had been living in a nearby boarding house, where he shared a room with another elderly man. It was the end of an extraordinary life, ranging in geography from South-East Asia and Australia to Europe, and more than half of it lived in New Zealand.

His had been a significant career. Schoon was an artist of considerable ability and his influence affected the course of modern art in New Zealand as he befriended such leading figures as Rita Angus, Gordon Walters and Colin McCahon. As art historian Michael Dunn has written, "His interest in others and his desire to teach and point the way, mean that his friendships and artistic allegiances ... were almost always fertile in suggesting departures."¹

It was also, in part, through Schoon's passion for indigenous cultures and his constant lobbying of institutions, that Māori visual culture began to be accepted both as a sophisticated form in its own right and as a national treasure. He was a pioneer photographer whose understanding of the artistic possibilities of the camera drew on avant-garde European practice.

Along with Isaac Gilsemans (the artist who sailed with Abel Tasman in 1642), Petrus van der Velden (1837–1913), and Christchurch-based artist Rudolf Boelee (b.1940), Schoon is one of the three most significant Dutch artists in New Zealand art history. Ron Brownson, Senior Curator of New Zealand and

¹ M. Dunn, "Rita Angus and Theo Schoon: An Unlikely Friendship." *Art New Zealand* 107, Winter 2003, p. 87.

Pacific Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, describes Schoon as the most highly trained artist of the time in New Zealand.²

Despite these achievements, he remains an enigmatic and obscure figure on the margins of New Zealand art history—a footnote to the careers of canonical figures such as McCahon and Walters. Yet his influence continues to the present. The Hamilton-born, Auckland-based textile artist Patricia Edwards acknowledges that before he died he “helped her develop an eye for detail and made her more observant.”³ The late Christchurch-born ceramicist Brent Hesselyn was inspired by Schoon to emigrate to Bali and establish a pottery workshop there in 1976.⁴

Schoon’s passing was marked by exhibitions at the Bathhouse Museum (Rotorua) and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery (Christchurch) in 1986. On 14 October 1987 the Schoon painting *One Man’s Picture is Another Man’s Rohrschach* [sic] *Test* (Fig. 4) sold for \$34,000 at the International Art Centre in Auckland, a not inconsiderable sum for a painting by a relatively unknown painter, perhaps reflecting the market’s resurgent interest in New Zealand modernism.⁵ Since then, there has been almost no interest until Damian Skinner’s MA thesis *Theo Schoon’s Interaction with Aspects of Māori Art* in 1996,⁶ and the donation in 2001 by Baltimore-based sexologist Dr John Money of his collection, containing 114 Schoon works, to the Eastern Southland Gallery in Gore. Both events have raised Schoon’s profile, providing an opportunity for the revaluation of his art, and recognition of his achievements.

Despite his sway over New Zealand’s developing modernist scene, Schoon is notably absent from the literature. The *Encyclopedia of New Zealand* makes no reference to Schoon in its comprehensive entry on New Zealand art despite

² Ron Brownson, conversation with author, Auckland, 16 Dec 2002.

³ P. Edwards, “Patterns of Identity: Textiles in Aotearoa.” Online. Available <http://www.textiles.org.nz/profiles/trishe/>

⁴ B. Hesselyn, “Jenggala Ceramics in Bali” (July–Aug 1997). Online. Available <http://www.asiacuisine.com/publishing/julaug/page76.html>

⁵ S. Rumsey, “Theo Schoon: A Chronology”. *Modern New Zealand* 8, 1995[a], pp. 31–32.

⁶ D. Skinner, *Theo Schoon’s Interaction with Aspects of Māori Art*. Auckland: University of Auckland, 1996. (Thesis: MA: Art History).

several more obscure artists having their own entries.⁷ Michael Dunn points out in his review of The Auckland City Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki's *Newstalk 1ZB 1950s Show*,⁸ "Schoon's role extends across the arts and crafts."⁹ With Schoon's involvement being so wide ranging, it seems strange that the *Encyclopedia* does not record him in any entry.

He does not appear in Peter Tomory's *New Zealand Painting*,¹⁰ *Painting 1890–1950*,¹¹ or (with Mark Young) *Painting 1827–1967*.¹² Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith's *Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839–1967*,¹³ and Keith's *The Development of Art in New Zealand*¹⁴ similarly overlook him. *The Space Between*,¹⁵ Francis Pound's book on the use of Māori imagery in New Zealand Pākehā modernist art, accords Schoon only a few cursory paragraphs, and then only as a contrast to the development of Gordon Walters and the way each chose to interact with Māori art. There is no mention of him in Peter Cape's *New Zealand Painting Since 1969*.¹⁶ This is not altogether surprising because throughout the 1970s, Schoon was mostly involved with photography, and growing and carving gourds, rather than painting. He is not to be found in Elva Bett's *New Zealand Art: a modern perspective*.¹⁷ Gil Docking's *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*,¹⁸ and neither of W. Brown's *100 New Zealand Artists*¹⁹ books, or make reference to him and, to date, there has been no monograph on him.²⁰

⁷ E. Caughey, *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Wellington: David Bateman Ltd., 1989. The original compiler for the 1984 entry is now unknown. (Maureen Robinson (David Bateman Ltd.), email to author, 20 March 2002.)

⁸ 28 November–28 March 1993.

⁹ M. Dunn, "Auckland's 1950s Show". *Art New Zealand* 66, Autumn 1993[a], p. 47.

¹⁰ P. Tomory, *New Zealand Painting*. Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1956.

¹¹ P. Tomory, *Painting 1890–1950*. Wellington: Reed, 1969.

¹² P. Tomory (Ed.), *Painting 1827–1967*. Wellington: Reed, 1968.

¹³ G. Brown and H. Keith, *Introduction to New Zealand Painting*. Auckland: Collins, 1969.

¹⁴ H. Keith, *The Development of Art in New Zealand: a series of six talks*. Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1969.

¹⁵ F. Pound, *The Space Between: Pākehā Use of Māori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art*. Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994.

¹⁶ P. Cape, *New Zealand Painting Since 1960: a study in themes and developments*. Auckland: Collins, 1979.

¹⁷ E. Bett, *New Zealand Art: a modern perspective*. Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986.

¹⁸ G. Docking, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*. Auckland: David Bateman Ltd., 1990.

¹⁹ W. Brown, *100 New Zealand Artists* and *Another 100 New Zealand Artists*. Auckland: Godwit, 1995 and 1996 respectively.

²⁰ M. Dunn, 2003, p. 87, n.1.

Cultural Tourist and Outsider

There are a number of possible reasons why art historians have tended to avoid Schoon. One is his status outside the mainstream New Zealand culture of the time. Another is the nationalistic emphasis on establishing New Zealand's art-historical canon, the sheer variety of different artistic projects and references in his career, and the fact that few of his works come across as finished products. The drawings, prints, paintings, gourds and carvings seem to be intended as a working-through of ideas in a much wider examination of European modernism and Māori aesthetics, in a process that continued throughout his life and career.

Should we then view him as a modern, or as a poseur experimenting with a modernist identity, much as he experimented with a Balinese persona? A desire for freedom from traditions and norms characterised Schoon's personality and general behaviour. He personified the romantic myth of the artist, stereotyped by Bruce Mason and John Pocock as:

an eccentric misfit 'wandering lonely as a cloud' ... at liberty to chart the geography of his isolation, the only territory unexplored, his own consciousness. And from this isolation came two parallel conceptions, the artist as Hero (Goethe, Beethoven, Delacroix) and the artist as Eccentric ... His vision had now perforce to be individual and the more individual the better, hence, in popular terms, the odder he was, the better artist.²¹

From contemporary accounts Schoon was, in everything he did, larger than life. He was the embodiment of the much-satirised Dutch characteristics *eigenwijs* (know-it-all) and *deftig* (slightly pompous). His charisma and flamboyance caused him to be noticed, and put him always near the centre of New Zealand's nascent Bohemian counterculture and artistic set.

Schoon stated that he had freed himself from the European academic and aesthetic traditions in which he was trained as a young artist. It is true that exposure to Māori imagery caused his own work to become much more abstract in an aesthetic sense, but it would be presumptuous to take on face value his claims that he completely severed himself from European art.

²¹ B. Mason and J. Pocock, *Theatre in Danger*. Hamilton: Paul Press, 1957, p. 28.

He investigated the translation of Western “Art” and “Culture” in relation to Māori art.²² There is, however, sufficient evidence to suggest that his concept of translation was to assimilate Māori visual culture into a particular kind of half-understood, Bauhaus-influenced modernism. Damian Skinner offers the following publicity statement, presumably written by Kees Hos, for an exhibition held at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland in 1965, as a kind of manifesto for the artist’s practice:

The disparity between East and West has been a constant factor in his critical attitude towards a rather exclusive Dutch tradition. This very conflict gave him an increasing awareness that the universal aspects of art could be the only answer to the parochial concepts of the European art tradition, so dependent on Greco-Roman art. He returned to Indonesia to claim more intensively his artistic heritage of Pacific Art ... When he came to New Zealand in 1939, his immediate interest in Maori art was merely an extension of this preoccupation.²³

If we accept this statement as Schoon's manifesto, it is apparent that the project was not entirely successful. He was unable to completely break away from the august tradition of Low Countries art because of his dependence on his Rotterdam training. If, instead, we take Schoon’s agenda to have been more self-serving - the desire to synthesise an identity for himself rather than (as he saw it) save Māori visual culture from stagnation - then he certainly achieved something to this end since he has become virtually synonymous with early Māori rock art, and gourd carving. Further examination is required.

A number of issues are raised. First, how was Schoon able to move aesthetically among some of the radically different cultures of Europe and Asia-Pacific? Second, what did he bring to New Zealand? The answer could lie with his own marginality. Michael Dunn describes him as “the archetypal outsider artist.”²⁴

As an “outsider”, wherever he stayed he was permanently in exile. In the East Indies he was a member of a colonial occupational regime, distanced from his European origins and identifying more with indigenous cultures than his own.

²² Cf. De Certeau on Intelligibility. H. De Certeau, *The Writing of History*. New York: University of Columbia Press, 1988, p. 3.

²³ D. Skinner, “Primitivist Posings: Theo Schoon at the New Vision Gallery.” *Art New Zealand* 86, 1998, pp. 69–73

In Europe he was again a colonial, this time orientalised and alien. In New Zealand he was a foreigner and particularly suspect, given the war in Europe. He produced art that did not fit the accepted mode. In Australia he was a decrepit old man who seems to have been of little interest to anyone.

He was also a relatively open homosexual at a time when it was not widely acceptable to be so—particularly in Islamic Java, conservative Dutch-colonial society, or the highly conservative British dominions of the Pacific.²⁵ This made him a natural target for a number of people. A. R. D. Fairburn, for instance, was as hostile on the subject of homosexuality as he was on modernist abstraction.²⁶

But Schoon was an artist, first and foremost. Throughout his life he behaved as though this status as artist somehow elevated him above intercultural politics and national identity. Yet the noble aspirations of the arts have not remained unsullied by the politics of Imperialism. The aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment through to the early twentieth century in their own way provided authority for the subjugation of what were perceived to be “inferior” peoples. Indeed, in 1902, the American historian J. A. Hobson recommended art as one of the tools of realising imperialist destiny: “The selfish forces which direct Imperialism should utilize the protective colours of ... disinterested movements.”²⁷

²⁴ M. Dunn, “Theo Schoon: Outsider Artist.” *Art New Zealand* 102, Spring 2002, p. 73.

²⁵ However, the expatriate artistic community in Bali with which Schoon appears to have been in contact, seems to have harboured an extensive community of openly homosexual artists. “Bali Arts and Crafts—Foreign Artists in Bali.” Online. Available <http://baliwww.com/bali/arts/>

²⁶ The status of homosexuality among New Zealand’s intelligentsia from the post-war period to the 1950s is complex, spanning from the openly effete flouting of D’Arcy Creswell to the deeply closeted Frank Sargeson. In the 1920s, both Creswell and Sargeson were involved in high profile court trials for homosexual behaviour that contributed further to New Zealand’s inherited, puritanical, colonial culture of homophobia and prejudice. By 1947, A. R. D. Fairburn—writer, critic, artist and close acquaintance of Schoon—had become pathologically obsessive on the subject of homosexuality; he harboured the paranoid delusion that there existed an international conspiracy of homosexual artists, writers, critics, editors and publishers who promoted each other at the expense of heterosexuals. He called it the “Green International”, and certainly would have viewed Schoon as evidence of its internationality (M. King. *Frank Sargeson: A Life*. Auckland and London: Viking (Penguin), 1995, pp. 283–284.) . Yet, in 1949, Fairburn was receiving mail on behalf of Schoon.

²⁷ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1902/1927 (reprint), p. 197.

European “culture” has always depended on its “other” in Asia and Africa, in trade, war, and colonisation. The East Indies was for several centuries the frontier of Europe and the place where hundreds of distinct cultures traded with and preyed upon each other. Schoon lived in a milieu of Dutch colonialism quite different from the British variety of the Dominion of New Zealand. British imperialism viewed Māori as a dying, primitive people to be pitied—an attitude that persisted well into the early twentieth century—and the Dominion as the seed of a future, dynamic Fabian Britain. Dutch colonists saw the Balinese and Javanese not so much as uncivilised as too decadent and superstitious to adequately govern themselves; the Dutch administrators seeing themselves in the role of the “Wiser Brother” to a *naif kind-volk* (naïve, childish people).²⁸

Schoon was able to “see”, appreciate and perhaps, to some extent, empathetically “understand” Māori and Balinese visual culture. Within art, however, what may be defined as “cultural property” is difficult to isolate. Schoon was very much a Western artist. His relationship with other cultures was ambiguous. He seems to have seen himself as negotiating a new synthesis among Dutch, East Asian, Māori and Pākehā.

Dunn highlights another side to the artist: a mercurial man; caustic, arrogant, egotistical, and yet at the same time inspirational and capable of great generosity. Schoon demanded the very best of those around him, and his belief in his own superior artistic genius within a mediocre New Zealand art world further reinforced his alienation from other people.²⁹ He could never identify with New Zealand beyond his interactions with Māori culture and a scattering of artists, and eventually grew to hate the country. He became obsessed with “making the final escape from New Zealand, even if I get as far as saving up for a burial at sea, rather than in this soil”.³⁰

²⁸ F. Gouda, “Teaching Indonesian Girls in Java and Bali.” *Women's History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1995, p.29.

²⁹ Dunn, 2002. pp. 70–73.

³⁰ T. Schoon, letter to M. Dunn, 11 Dec 1964, quoted Dunn, 2002.

It is therefore not surprising that Schoon chose to associate or align himself with what was marginal to Western European culture: the indigenous, the avant-garde, the mentally ill, at all times searching for a place to belong. This is comparable with Meyer Schapiro's explanation of Picasso's passion for West African art—that having painted the poor and marginalised during his “Blue” and “Rose” periods, he could only move on to portray even more marginalised people.³¹ Schoon found his *turangawaewae* or “place to stand” in this marginality. Māori society's concern for the welfare of the group rather than the individual may also have held strong appeal.

Perhaps, as Jorge Luis Borges observes in his essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition”, it is possible for the outsider to be the supreme innovator in Western culture because he or she can act within it without feeling especially attached to it.³² But regarding Schoon's deliberate ethnic and cultural ambiguity and negotiation, we must first come to new understandings in the definition of terms. A Marxist approach perhaps most conveniently outlines the problem of Schoon's identity:

What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between ... the dominant notion which connects it to nation and ‘race’ and ... the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery ... a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as ‘ethnic artists’ ... We are all, in that sense, ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. But this is also a recognition that this is not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities. This precisely is the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity.³³

Schoon's cosmopolitan, widely travelled life is a precursor of our own trans-national artistic period of jet-set globetrotting, the Internet and World Wide Web, and borderless cultural exchange. He is also a link to the history of the artist as colonial explorer from the nineteenth century's imperial expansions.

³¹ C. Madar, “Traces: Primitive and Modern Expressions.” (Review). *ARTnews*, Jan 2002, p. 116.

³² J. L. Borges, *Labyrinths*. London and New York: Penguin, 1964, p. 163.

³³ S. Hall, “New Ethnicities.” In K. Mercer (Ed.), *Black Film/British Cinema*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988, p. 29.

Even definitions of his “ethnicity” are not straightforward.³⁴ He may have spoken some Malay – the traditional lingua franca of the Indies. He spoke at least two cosmopolitan European languages; Dutch and English.

Schoon was presumably raised in the Christian faith (both Dutch Protestantism and Roman Catholicism being very strict in matters of sexuality). The Christian names of his family suggest affiliations with the latter, but he was also interested in Buddhism—something he was able to pass on to others such as Rita Angus. Indeed, he seems to have quite openly reviled Christianity at points in his life and was openly scornful of McCahon’s religiously themed paintings.³⁵

As a Dutch colonial in Java, Schoon was raised in a colonial “patron-client” culture, where deferential native servants were ubiquitous, and the indigenous Javanese and Balinese, even those of royal status, were more or less considered to be an underclass in their own islands. In the Netherlands he witnessed the rise of Nazism and its related racial theories.³⁶ He experienced entrenched racism in New Zealand, directed both at Māori and himself. As a foreigner, he would, almost immediately, have become a magnet for antagonism even had the Second World War, with all its racial and cultural politics, not been raging in the European and Pacific theatres. This would have further emphasised his own feelings of alienation and empathy for Māori, leading him on a quest for the mataora (living face) of Māori art.

Although he never learned the Māori language³⁷ he might even be described as a late reincarnation of the Pākehā-Māori—foreigners, usually European, who were assimilated into Māori tribal life, acting as “mediators of meaning

³⁴ P. Bourdieu, “Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception.” *International Social Science Journal*, 20, 1969, pp. 589–612.

³⁵ Dunn, 2002, p. 72.

³⁶ Although Schoon’s own attitudes to racial relativity are complex, he clearly overcame a lot of inherited cultural prejudice. He was initially excited by the social revolutionary atmosphere surrounding the rise of Nazism in Europe (source: Kelvin Anderson, March 2001) although he, as a homosexual and, later, an abstract artist, was the perfect example of what the Nazis most despised.

³⁷ Dunn, 2002, p. 72.

between the cultures.”³⁸ However, his assimilation into Māori culture was limited to artistic endeavours. Perhaps he may be considered a kaitakawaenga (go-between) for the two traditions. What is clear, though, is that he was the first European artist to try to understand the mauri (life essence) and wairua (spirit) of Māoritanga (Māori culture).

The Space Between High And Low

In 1968, visiting New York art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994) declared New Zealand “too isolated from the hub of the international art scene [i.e. New York] to produce anything but second rate art.”³⁹ While this undiplomatically dismisses the achievements and potential global appreciation of Frances Hodgkins, Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston, Len Lye, Max Gimblett, Ralph Hotere, Billy Apple, and others, it does provide yet another reason for critical avoidance of Schoon—the perceived mediocrity of much of his work. Michael Dunn, speaking of Schoon’s kowhaiwhai paintings, has written: “These hardly qualify as painting in the high art sense but relate to the more ambitious gouaches and small canvasses of his friend Gordon Walters.”⁴⁰ Certainly much of Schoon’s art-historical importance lies with his influence on the likes of Walters, McCahon and Dennis Knight Turner, but given recent trends towards the development of painting as a genre or strategy of conceptual art, it is time for a reconsideration.

Schoon is also particularly important for his highlighting of a number of important artistic issues unique to New Zealand:

- What is the relationship between Māori traditions and Pākehā art?
- What is the place of abstraction in modern New Zealand art?

³⁸ T. Bentley, *P•keh• M•ori: the extraordinary story of the Europeans who lived as M•ori in early New Zealand*. Auckland and London: Penguin, 1999, pp. 9–10.

³⁹ Quoted in J. Paton, “Building new steps on the global ziggurat of art power.” *The Press*, 14 Sept 1994. This position was effectively “reversed” in 1994 when Thomas McEvilly, on behalf of *Artforum International* (the present incarnation of Greenberg’s *Artforum*), declared New Zealand to have “entered” the area of “discourse” at the *Under Capricorn* conference on art, politics and culture, held in Wellington. (A. Brunton, “Tilting the Plato-Kant Axis.” *Illusions* 24, Spring 1995, p. 47.)

⁴⁰ Dunn, 1993a, p. 47.

- What is the position of New Zealand art relative to international Western and other global developments?

It is also worth observing that W. Main and J. B. Turner recognised Schoon as “one of the most advanced photographers of his era.” in their 1993 volume *New Zealand Photography from the 1840s to the Present*.⁴¹

Schoon’s work has often been included in the craft movement. In 1968, Dunedin artist R. N. O’Reilly labelled him “something of a folk artist”.⁴² It is unlikely Schoon would have considered himself as such as his interest in the Bauhaus would naturally have led him to blur the boundaries of art, craft and design. Craft, however, brings with it an aura of amateurism - an important thread of concern in New Zealand art criticism in the 1950s and 1960s. Peter Tomory has asserted:

In a country with a small population, lack of a strong body of professional painters, and the absence of a core of properly informed opinion, the cult of amateurism has spread widely and with it, amateur criticism. Serious art can flourish only if there is strong, informed criticism to sweep away the dross and explore what is good. But many a serious painter in New Zealand has been ignored partly through the fact that critics have been so singularly insensitive to painting, and impatient of any artist who dared to express something at variance with current ideas.⁴³

Again, this attitude could explain how Schoon, with his European credentials, could have such a wide-ranging influence over New Zealand avant-garde art in the 1950s, and why, simultaneously, he could be just as widely ignored by the professional and academic art establishments because of his obsession with the peripheral.

Another reason could be Schoon’s background in design—but it was architects, industrial and graphic designers who were in the vanguard of experimental aesthetics in New Zealand, particularly in commercial design that allowed them to experiment with pure form and Māori motifs. In 1906, the English

⁴¹ W. Main and J. B. Turner, *New Zealand Photography from the 1840s to the Present*. Auckland: Photoforum Inc., 1993, p. 55.

⁴² R. N. O’Reilly, “Art and the Encyclopaedia 2. Maori Art.” *Ascent: A Journal of the Arts in New Zealand*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1968, p. 61.

⁴³ F. Pound, “Painting and *Landfall*, and Painting as Literature’s Death.” *Landfall* 185, April 1993[a], p. 81.

ceramic firm Doulton produced the first of several wares using decorative motifs sourced from Augustus Hamilton's 1901 book *Maori Art*. Manufactured in England but requested by Doulton's New Zealand retailers for the burgeoning New Zealand market, this was one of the earliest uses of Māori motifs in commercial design.⁴⁴

Examples of modernist avant-garde design in New Zealand can be found in May Smith's textiles, Frank Carpay's Crown Lynn ceramics, and the furniture designed by the Group Architects and Brenner Associates in the 1950s.⁴⁵ In 1951, Eric McCormack noted that A.R.D. Fairburn's and Eric Lee-Johnson's references to Oceanic imagery, Schoon's "Māori shelter drawings", and Dennis Knight Turner's "primitive motifs" took from Polynesian art "small abstract designs ... highly original in conception and delightful in colour", but he considered them "rather intractable material" for European artists,⁴⁶ feeling that it was anachronistic in mid-twentieth century formal art, but vibrant and exciting in decorative design.

Schoon's Bauhaus interests would also have estranged him from New Zealand craft practice. The highly developed Arts and Crafts Movement in New Zealand (at its height between 1870 and 1940) was largely based on the South Kensington system of craft and design. This model drew heavily on Ruskin's separation of craft from trade, and the production values of William Morris. It was firmly centred in archaising taste and in the decorative aspects of design, contrasting starkly with the Bauhaus' utilitarianism and its concerns with pure form and structural volume over the decorative. The Bauhaus particularly differed in its recognition that the machine was merely a mechanical development of the craftsman's hand and tools.

Bauhaus designs were essentially craft products, which used geometrically pure shapes to give the appearance of industrial production. This was an

⁴⁴ J. Quérée, *Royal Doulton: Illustrated with Treasures from New Zealand and Australia*. Christchurch: Canterbury Museum, 1993, p. 72; A. Hamilton, *Maori Art*. Wellington: New Zealand Institute, 1901.

⁴⁵ D. Lloyd-Jenkins, "Modernism & the Auckland Design Community." *New Zealand Home & Building: The Newstalk 1ZB 1950s Show*. Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery & Robin Beckett, 1992, pp. 56–65.

entirely opposite viewpoint to the Arts and Crafts Movement, which wanted its products to look like traditional, ornately decorated handcraft. The Arts and Crafts Movement was still a powerful influence at the Canterbury College School of Art in the late 1930s and would have been felt by Schoon when he attended there in 1939.⁴⁷ Additionally, reference to the Bauhaus during the war was subject to an uninformed, but understandable anti-German prejudice.

Formal internationalist art (almost entirely Euro-American), as vaunted by American critic Clement Greenberg and practised in New Zealand by abstract artists like Gordon Walters and Milan Mrkšić, was construed on the basis of aesthetic criteria that supposedly transcended any socio-political categories.⁴⁸ Theoretically, “great” art had nothing to do with gender, class or culture, and very little to do with history, something patently untrue from an art-historical perspective. Artists and their work fall in and out of fashion for those very specific reasons.

Schoon’s art, because of its relationship to craft, and immersion in Māori practice and culture, ensured that he could never be a major artist in a New Zealand context. From the viewpoint of the then-conventional Anglo-centric Pākehā art, Māori traditional visual culture was largely seen to be static and peripheral, and craft was an activity more suited to women secluded in the culturally-sacred institution of the home. Photography was considered to occupy a place in the artistic hierarchy (as Eric Lee-Johnson once put it) somewhere “midway between doodling and washing the dishes”.⁴⁹ Abstract modernism was still securing a certain foothold in New Zealand at the time Schoon arrived. Modern New Zealand painting tended to be derived from British tonal impressionism.

Schoon And Popular Taste

⁴⁶ E. McCormack, “Auckland Painting.” *Landfall* December 1951, p. 306.

⁴⁷ A. Calhoun, *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand 1870–1940*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000, p. 181.

⁴⁸ T. Eggleton and P. Fuller, “Value for Art and Exchange.” *New Left Review*, Nov–Dec. 1983, pp. 76–90.

⁴⁹ R. Wolfe, “Keeping Photography in the Dark.” *Art New Zealand* 94, Autumn 2000, p. 84.

Much of Schoon's early work was commercial and for a populist taste. If his paintings of doe-eyed Balinese dancers from the 1930s are compared to the pre-Second World War Javanese paintings of the populist artist Vladimir Tretchikoff (born in Siberia, 1913),⁵⁰ the trained eye sees that both display distinctive narrative and emotive qualities in which lies the vernacular appeal behind their popularity. Given Tretchikoff's enormous celebrity in pre-war Jakarta high society,⁵¹ it seems likely Schoon would have heard of him. However, whereas Schoon fled to New Zealand when war broke out, Tretchikoff wound up in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Java.

The works of both Schoon and Tretchikoff display similarities from a shared heritage in the "Beautiful Indies" style: the daring use of colour, the realism, aggressively expressionistic backgrounds, easily recognisable visual conventions and the intensely attractive sense of drama, mystery and sentimentality. However, this makes it highly unlikely that the Dutch artist's paintings would have been seen worthy of serious attention by the critical cultural elite.

Schoon seems to have recognised this as he placed little value on his portrait work—something that can be extended to his East Indies work.⁵² In 1964 he recommended to Michael Dunn:

Please turn a blind eye to the awful portraits and scenes, that the locals may produce, specially painted for them by Theo Schoon, unless it gives you a special perverse delight to uncover my old sins.⁵³

This reflects the schism that developed between figurative and abstract, which most dramatically manifested itself in the establishment of the Kelliher Trust and Fletcher Trust awards and their associated collections.⁵⁴ New Zealand

⁵⁰ Tretchikoff's most famous painting *Chinese Girl* (date unknown) was painted in Java at this time.

⁵¹ U. Geller, "Lady in Green." *Sunday Times Magazine*, 11 Aug 2002. Online. Available <http://www.uri-geller.com/articles/ley-in-green.htm>

⁵² Dunn, 2003, p. 85.

⁵³ Schoon, letter to M. Dunn, undated, 1982. Quoted in Dunn, 2003.

⁵⁴ These two competing traditions in the 1950s and 1960s can best be observed by comparing two corporate art collections established around financial prizes. The Kelliher Awards were established by Dominion Breweries magnate Sir Henry Kelliher in 1956 to encourage the painting of representational landscape works, and in 1962 the industrialist Sir James Fletcher set up the Fletcher Collection to promote avant-garde abstraction. (D. Skinner, "Modernist

modernist abstraction of this period, including Schoon's, is somewhat anachronistic. By 1935, all the most important post-impressionists were dead. Klee died in 1940. Soutine, Mondrian and Kandinsky died in 1944. Picasso was nearly sixty. De Kooning and Pollock were producing notable work.

Schoon Today

Schoon's reputation as an international artist has slowly grown since his death, with his inclusion in an entry by Damian Skinner in the 2000 edition of the *Grove Dictionary of Art*.⁵⁵ He rates a brief mention in Haks' and Maris' *Lexicon of Foreign Artists who Visualized Indonesia 1600-1950*.⁵⁶ Melbourne-based Australian writer Kevin Murray, writing on the relationship between Western art and indigenous culture in the former British colonies of Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, places Schoon with Owen Mapp, Warrick Freeman and Donn Salt within the "Stone, Bone and Shell" movement. This category is centred on artists using "autochthonic" materials such as pounamu ("greenstone", a nephrite closely resembling jade) and traditional Māori motifs such as the hei matau or fish hook.⁵⁷ Also included in this group are pounamu carvers Peter Hughson, Cliff Dalziel and R. Ansin,⁵⁸ as well, possibly, as Mimo Diana, Hepi Maxwell, Russell Beck, Neil Brown, Alfred Poole, John Edgar, and Rob Lynes.⁵⁹

The richness, energy and sophistication of Theo Schoon's art originates in the traditions of Dutch modernism, an elaborate matrix of South-East Asian, Māori and European academic cross-references, and an extraordinary, but sadly frustrated, talent and driving vision that deserves a far greater acknowledgement than it has hitherto received.

Victories: *Representation and Reaction* at the Sarjeant." *Art New Zealand* 105, Summer 2002-03, pp. 86-89.)

⁵⁵ D. Skinner, *Grove Dictionary of Art Online*. Available <http://www.artnet.com/library/07/0767/T076763.asp>

⁵⁶ L. Haks and J. Maris, *Lexicon of Foreign Artists Who Visualized Indonesia 1600-1950*. Utrecht: Gert Jan Bestebeurtje, 1995, p. 239.

⁵⁷ K. Murray, "How to make friends and avoid Apartheid." *Art Monthly*, Nov 2001. Online. Available <http://www.kitezh.com/texts/apartheid.htm>

⁵⁸ Schoon wrote about Hughson and Dalziel in "Designing for Jade." *The New Zealand Lapidary*, Vol. 4, No. 4, June 1971, pp. 19-22.

⁵⁹ R. Beck, "Jade in the South Pacific." In R. Keverne (Ed.), *Jade*. London: Anness Publishing, 1991, pp. 220.

CHAPTER 2

SCHOON'S EARLY LIFE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA 1915–1927

Legacy of the Spice Trade

Very little can be ascertained about Schoon's earliest years. The bare facts are these. Theodorus Johannes Schoon was born on 31 July 1915, near Kebumen on the south coast of Central Java. He was the younger son of Johannes Theodorus Schoon and Barbara Isabella Maria Schoon (née Steegemans). His parents had left Rotterdam in the Netherlands for Java with their first son, Pieter, in July 1914, shortly before the First World War broke out. The family settled in a small village outside Kebumen (see map of Central Java, Fig. 5).¹

Theo Schoon was born into the excitement and wonder of the developing Modern Age. In 1915, Albert Einstein formulated the General Theory of Relativity, Kasimir Malevich proclaimed Suprematist art in Russia, and the British trans-Atlantic passenger liner *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine, a casualty of the Great War. Socially though, Schoon's world was closer to the seventeenth century than the twentieth. The Dutch colonies in the South-East Indies by that stage existed in a kind of lingering afternoon of decline.

Schoon could not have wished for a more historically exciting and exotic backdrop for his upbringing. Java had always been the most important of the 13,677 tropical islands that stretch more than 5,160 km along the equator, making up the modern South-East Asian nation of Indonesia.² For over five centuries these islands served as Europe's gateway to Asia and were the source of spices that in Europe were quite often more precious than gold. For the most part, the process of Western colonisation of the "Known World" was preceded by the Cross and the Sword. In South-East Asia, however, the European

¹ Christine Leov-Lealand, email to author, 22 April 2001; Sally Schoon (Schoon's niece), email to author, 14 April 2003.

² D. de Voss, *The Insider's Guide to Indonesia*. Ashbourne: Moorland Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993, p. 16.

vanguard came from merchant trading houses. In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama chartered a sea-route to India, and South-East Asia took hold of the European imagination.

Unlike the French colonial *mission civilisatrice* or Britain's determination to be the world's supreme naval power, the Portuguese were not so much interested in transforming the people of other cultures into subject second-class Europeans. Rather, they wanted to establish more secure trading bases like Macao in China and Goa in India, through which spices could be relayed back to Lisbon. The Portuguese were quickly followed by the Spanish, English and Dutch, who sought pepper from the islands in west of the Indies, and cloves and nutmeg from further east on the Molucca islands. In the fierce struggle for a spice monopoly that followed, it was the Dutch who finally emerged victorious. In the Netherlands circa 1602, the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (United East Indian Company) became the most important European spice agency.³

The VOC possessed extraordinary powers and functioned more or less as an independent government, with the constitutional ability to raise armies, sign treaties, and administer justice to its subjects on behalf of the Netherlands government. Tremendous wealth was accumulated, but eventually the spice economy became unsustainable. By the mid-nineteenth century, the islands had lost much of their economic viability and were becoming a drain on the Dutch economy. The imposition of *Cultuurstelsel* ("Cultivation System") colonial policy in 1830 re-directed the Indies economy into luxury exports like sugar, tea and quinine, and forced the indigenes into specialist cultivation of cash crops. This resulted in widespread starvation among non-élite Javanese and Balinese as they were not able to grow much food for themselves.⁴

The Genesis of Indonesia

Liberal people back in the Netherlands reacted against this, and a new "Ethical Policy" was put in place in 1870. The basis of the Ethical Policy was to

³ F. A. Wagner, *Indonesia, The Art of an Island Group*. London: Methuen, 1959, pp. 142–3.

improve the lot of the colonised peoples of the Dutch East Indies through education and economic development. Native cultural groups and societies were established, and the children of the Javanese élite were sent to the Netherlands for higher education. This introduced them to many Western ideas, including Marxism, which some brought back with them to the Indies. Ahmed Sukarno (1901-1970), first President of independent Indonesia from 1950 to 1965, was a product of this largesse.⁵

Marxist thought proved popular with Western-educated Javanese, as it suggested to them a framework for their liberation and independence from the Dutch. The resulting native Javanese Communist movements, often in combination with Islamic militancy, formed a nucleus of revolution against colonialism and a number of small indigenous uprisings during Schoon's early childhood, and ultimately led to the 1950 revolution that created the modern state of Indonesia.⁶

Life in the Twilight of the Dutch East Indies

Schoon's family was of the Dutch colonial élite. His father, a *tropenadel* (a mildly pejorative Dutch term meaning "tropical nobleman"), is said to have been an administrator of a juvenile correction facility. He also owned a brick factory in Kebumen, which was (and still is) a centre for the manufacture of ceramics. W. Main and J. B. Turner describe Schoon's father as "an architect turned public servant who later became a governor of youth prisons."⁷ Skinner calls him an administrator of technical and reform schools.⁸ Elsewhere Schoon's father is written of as being high up in the administration of the

⁴ Wagner, p. 219.

⁵ L. E. Williams, *South East Asia: A History*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 175.

⁶ Williams, p. 149.

⁷ Main and Turner, p. 55.

⁸ D. Skinner, "Schoon, Theodorus Johannes (1915–1985): Artist, Photographer, Carver." In *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. 5, 1941–1960*. Auckland & Wellington: Auckland University Press & Department of Internal Affairs, 2000, pp. 461–462.

thriving industrial potteries and brick kilns in Java.⁹ Many of the prison and school buildings in Java were constructed in the early twentieth century and were built in bricks from these celebrated kilns, which may provide the connection.¹⁰ Theo's niece Sally Schoon believes that her grandfather also worked as an engineer.¹¹

Schoon's sense of personal alienation from his own culture began in the home. The young Theo saw very little of his parents and was largely raised by Javanese (and perhaps Balinese) nannies and servants. This upbringing immersed him in these two cultures to the extent that he identified more with them than with his own. He also realised, from a relatively early age, that he was homosexual.¹² These things set in place the difficult temperament that made him such a perennial outsider and drove him to seek out a Javanese culture more liberal in many ways than that of the colonial Dutch.

At the start of the twentieth century, shortly before Theo and Pieter were born, the multicultural society of Java was undergoing rapid liberalisation with *Hollandsch-Inlandsche* schools being opened to the children of the Javanese nobility. From about 1900, the Dutch colonials, following their Ethical Policy, developed a highly romanticised "Orientalist" sense of *noblesse oblige* toward the Javanese and Balinese—a well intentioned call for the *opheffig* (uplifting) of the natives. This idea was particularly focused on the Western-style education of the offspring of the aristocratic families of Java (*Priyays*) and Bali, in the belief that Western "civilised" sensibilities would "trickle down" to the villages.

This process of incorporating the indigenous aristocracies into a colonial social taxonomy made it perfectly plausible (as is believed) that Pieter and Theo

⁹ S. Rumsey, "Theo Schoon: Impressed Decoration of Clay." *New Zealand Potter*, No. 2, 1985, p. 19.

¹⁰ Christine Leov-Lealand, email to author, 22 April, 2001.

¹¹ S. Schoon, 2003.

¹² John Perry, telephone conversation with author, 30 Nov 2002. Perry is former Director of Rotorua Museum and Art Gallery, and friend of Schoon.

Schoon, as young children, may well have been educated alongside Javanese, and possibly even Balinese, princelings.¹³

His father's position also indirectly initiated the boy's artistic leanings. He was first exposed to Javanese plastic arts as a child when a worker from his father's brick and tile factory was sent to mind him, and entertained the boy by making a variety of figurines from strips and coils of clay. This seems to have encouraged a general appreciation in Schoon of both Javanese and Balinese ceramic arts.¹⁴

Schoon's childhood geography fuelled his imagination and sense of adventure. The excellent rail and communications network established by the colonial Dutch administration would have made it possible for the Schoon family to easily embark on excursions to Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and, by ferry, to Bali. Kebumen is also located close to a number of famous archaeological sites, including the complex at Borobudur. During the years Schoon was growing up nearby, these sites were receiving much attention from European scholars. Borobudur, part buried, and covered in thick vegetation, was discovered by the British explorer and Colonial Governor Sir Stanford Raffles in 1815, but the first major reconstruction works had been completed just five years before Schoon was born. It was supervised by Thadeus van Erp, a young Second Lieutenant engineer for the Dutch colonial government, with the assistance of the art historian J. C. A. Brandes and civil engineer Van de Kamer.¹⁵

Borobudur

The Borobudur complex was built in the eighth century CE by the Śailendra dynasty, and is located at Magelang, roughly at the centre of Java, half-way between the Europeanised colonial city of Bandung, and Yogyakarta, ancient capital of the Javanese kings. The complex stands on a small rise fifteen metres

¹³ Gouda, p. 25.

Over a decade later, in 1939, attempts were made in Primary Schools (built in the traditional style) to base gymnastics on Javanese dance postures. (Wagner, p. 226.)

¹⁴ T. Schoon, "The Art of Njoman Suara." *New Zealand Potter*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Autumn 1983.

¹⁵ J. Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas*. Boston: Shambala, 1990, p. 39; L. Frédéric & J-L Nou, *Borobudur*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1996, p. 35.

above the verdant coconut groves and rice fields of the fertile Kedu Plain, bounded by ranges of volcanic cones—some as high as 3000 metres—and jagged limestone cliffs on all sides. Tropical storms drench the plain.¹⁶

Borobudur consists of a series of concentric terraces of decreasing area, rising zigurrat-like in a spiral to a central peak, its masonry laid without mortar. This geometrically simple form is thickly encrusted with complex decoration, totalling 1,900 square metres in area. There are 1,460 carved stone panels depicting the life of the Buddha. These are surrounded by a further 600 square metres of decorative carving. Set around this enormous monument are 504 life-sized Buddha statues carved from volcanic rock. Above these are the bell-shaped stupas, each containing a hidden statue of Buddha that can only be viewed by looking through the lattice-like stone sheath of a stupa.¹⁷ It is the largest stone monument in Indonesia, and within the whole of South-East Asia, only Angkor Wat in Cambodia is comparable.

The ancient Javanese Buddhists mounted Borobudur as pilgrims, to climb the man-made mountain and pass physically and spiritually through the ten stages of development that would ultimately transform them into enlightened bodhisattvas.¹⁸ Surely this idea would have appealed to Schoon as someone who believed strongly in his own unique greatness and destiny.

By the time Schoon saw the complex, van Erp's work had been undone. The temple, protected for centuries by earth and jungle, began to deteriorate rapidly after the restoration because of its exposure to the torrential downpours of the region.¹⁹ One can imagine young Theo approaching the ruin of the complex and seeing the nesting stupas rising up out of the jungle mists like a great bell, as the Comte de Beauvoir described it in 1866, or as scholar W.O.J. Niewenkamp imagined it in 1931, a pink lotus blossom rising from a sea of green.²⁰ Making the ascent up the steps to the galleries, he would have found himself, on every new level, in a narrow corridor with only the sky overhead.

¹⁶ Miksic, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Miksic, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Miksic, p. 39.

¹⁹ Frédéric and Nou, p. 35.

These he would have followed around the perimeter of the terraces, examining the intricate and detailed carvings and noting the graceful gestures and mudras adopted by the subjects, until eventually he reached the highest point of the complex.²¹ Borobudur is a symbol of Meru, the cosmic mountain of Buddhism, covered by the sky roof—a schematic representation of the cosmos. It is a mandala that could only be reached through isolated alleys acting as incarnations and stages.²² Schoon's life and career would, itself, develop through a similar series of stages and tribulations.

Living in Two Worlds

Experiences like this during his upbringing in Java exerted a formative influence on Schoon, as he would later write:

I have always enjoyed the mutual astonishment, of Indonesians for European ways and vice versa. But oh, how lovely it was, to live in two different worlds at once. If I sound a bit peculiar in my letters, it is this which has put its indelible stamp on me. I have double vision.²³

This “double vision”²⁴ is, as Skinner argues, the reason Schoon was able to understand Māori art in an intuitive way, radically different from most other Europeans,²⁵ facilitating his ability to cross what in Māori is known as “pae” or the demarcation between opposites and complimentary states, and in bicultural discourse, the cultural identity barrier that exists between Māori and Pākehā worlds.²⁶

²⁰ Sockmono and de Casparis, p. 72; Frédéric and Nou, pp. 21 and 35.

²¹ Miksic, pp. 42–44.

²² “The Berger Foundation.” Online. Available http://www.bergerfoundation.ch/Home/high_borobudur.html ; “Travel 2 Indonesia.” Online. Available <http://www.emp.pdx.edu/htliono/borobudu.html>

²³ T. Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, 20 Sept 1967. Manuscript 61, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. p. 1, n. 1.

²⁴ Interestingly this concept of “double vision” has found resonance in the discourse of Pacific post-colonial historical revisionism and theory; for example, the title of a recent collection of essays: N. Thomas, & D. Weightman (Eds.), *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁵ D. Skinner, “Theo Schoon: Indonesia and the Re-fashioning of Self.” *Art AsiaPacific* 23, 1999[a], p. 68.

²⁶ R. Jahnke, “Voices Beyond the Pae.” In N. Thomas and D. Weightman (Eds.), *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

In two thousand years of Western history, Java has encountered all the civilisations of Europe and Asia, and has taken, borrowed, purchased and inherited what it needed and desired for its culture. The effect is highly hybridised. Virtually every religion of global reach is represented: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and animism are all present in the sum of influences for an unlikely cultural equation. Ethnographically, Java is an extremely complex place. The young Schoon batted on this complexity to determine his own identity.

European modernist concerns were also to be found there. Shortly after Schoon was born, some European architects in the Dutch colony were trying to find a synthesis between the modernism prevailing in Europe and the indigenous architectural forms of Java. Delft-trained Thomas Karsten and Henri Maclaine-Pont particularly tried to engage with Javanese construction traditions. Together they built the Technische Hoogeschool (Institute of Technology) building in Bandung in 1918.²⁷ Sukarno began Engineering studies there in 1921 a background that allowed him to blend traditional Javanese culture with an appreciation of Western technology.²⁸

Highly respected scholar of Maori culture and former *Te Ao Hou* editor Dr Margaret Orbell attributes Schoon's complexity to his background, the Dutch East Indies being a crucial influence socially as well as aesthetically—two modes she believes were inseparable in his case. He enjoyed the shared traditions and art motifs he saw employed, partly because of their intrinsic strength, partly because they were a refuge from a modern world he did not like. These feelings would remain with him as an element of sentimentality in the nostalgia he felt for the East Indies.²⁹

Schoon's world-view would be drastically restructured when he was removed from the comfortable social cul-de-sac of the Dutch Indies and plunged into the sophisticated cosmopolitan existence of the busiest port in Europe.

²⁷ Jahnke, *Ibid.*

²⁸ L. E. Williams, *South East Asia: A History*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 175.

²⁹ Margaret Orbell, email to author, 8 April 2002, pp. 1–2.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOON IN EUROPE: 1927–1935

Rotterdam

In 1927 the twelve-year old Theo Schoon journeyed to his ethnic motherland, the Netherlands. As was customary for the children of the Indo-Dutch colonial elite, he and his brother had been sent “home” to complete their secondary education. The boys were to stay with family in Rotterdam.¹

It is difficult to imagine two places of greater contrast than the intimate colonial society of tropical, relaxed South-East Asia with its sultry climate, native servants, wide plantations, clubs and balls, and dour, cold Rotterdam with its frantic industry and ships from all over the world. It must have come as something of a shock to the Schoon boys. An exotic reminder of the empire, in the Netherlands they would probably have been considered *Indische*, trapped between both worlds and neither truly Dutch nor East Indian, despite Rotterdam’s cosmopolitan nature.²

Indisch is the Dutch adjective from *Indie* ... The meaning of the word is deeply rooted in the colonial context. *Indisch* means 'not Dutch', but for Indos [Eurasian Dutch] it also means 'not Indonesian' ... There were so many forms of 'Indischness' not only depending on education and social status, but also geographical location.³

Art in Rotterdam

¹ S. Schoon, 14 April 2003.

² Dutch born Christchurch artist Rudolf Boelee recalls as a child of eight or nine in Rotterdam, the sudden influx of refugees from the Indies during the Second World War. Many refugees failed to easily adjust to life in the Netherlands, resulting in frequent street brawls. (Rudolf Boelee, conversation with author, 29 March 2003.)

³ W. Anthonio, *Tjalie Robinson: 'Reflections in a Brown Eye'*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan; PhD Thesis, 1990, p. 5. As Andrew Goss notes, in post-war Netherlands the term also came to refer to ex-colonials still emotionally connected to the Indies. (A. Goss, "From *Tong-Tong* to *Tempo Doeloe*: Eurasian Memory Work and the Bracketing of Dutch Colonial History, 1957-1961." *Indonesia* 70, October 2000, p. 22.)

The cover of a guidebook to Rotterdam, published by Voorwaarts in that city, circa 1928, depicts the globe centred on the port with a spider's web of trade routes spreading out. (fig. 6) Some lines splay into Scandinavia and Great Britain. Some head east through the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal. This is the route the Schoon boys would have sailed from Java. Others bound in a series of hops down the underbelly of Africa to the former Boer colonies of the south, or thread across the Atlantic Ocean to North and South America. The guidebook is set in a bold modernist sans serif font and uses the balanced-but-asymmetrical visual masses popularised by De Stijl. It was designed by Piet Zwart (1885–1977), a member of Rotterdam's burgeoning avant-garde and a teacher at the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten en Technische.⁴

Rotterdam is thus depicted as the heart of a vast trading empire conveying capital and goods throughout the world. In 1930 the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens made a film called *The Bridge* which recorded, in a series of rapidly changing shots, the construction of a new railway bridge over the Maas river, as Rotterdam metamorphosed from “the village on the river” into a “harbour machine” throughout the 1920s.⁵ The Boijmans Museum of Art in Rotterdam has used this as an apt metaphor for the city's high-paced embracing of all aspects of modernity in the early twentieth century:

Architecture, photography, film and design in Rotterdam developed in a manner paralleling this tumultuous growth. [The architects] Brinkman and Van der Vlugt realized a heretofore unknown dimension of modernity with their world-famed Van Nelle factory, constructed of concrete, steel and glass, as did Oud with his housing projects and Dudok with his department store De Bijenkorf (The Beehive). Innovation was also manifested in the industrial furniture designs of among others Verbeek, Gispen and Van Nelle's designer Jongert. The development of photography was stimulated by Elenbaas, Kamman and such versatile artists as Zwart and Schuitema.⁶

The city of Rotterdam, the second Dutch city after Amsterdam, and gateway to the European hinterland via the Rhône, was (unlike Amsterdam or The Hague) not considered a centre for art until its post-war reconstruction. There is a

⁴ *Rotterdam*, Rotterdam: Voorwaarts, ca. 1928. Collection of David Levine. Online. Available http://www.travelbrochuregraphics.com/Benelux_3/rotterdammag1.htm

⁵ Boijmans Museum (Rotterdam) website. Online. Available <http://www.boijmans.rotterdam.nl/engels/agenda/archief/trichten.htm>

⁶ Boijmans Museum website.

proverb that states, “*te Rotterdam het fortuin, wordt vermeerd, te Amsterdam beheerd en te’s Gravenhage verteed*” (wealth is increased in Rotterdam, managed in Amsterdam and spent in The Hague)—fitting for a primarily industrial city and the largest, busiest port in the world.⁷

What Rotterdam lacked in cultural tradition it made up for as an incubator and patron to modern art. It was home to artist Kees van Dongen (1877–1968) and Willem de Kooning was born in 1904 and studied there. The Oldenzeel Kunstgalerie, which opened in 1859, was one of the first European institutions to accord institutional recognition of van Gogh, showing his work as early as 1893. The gallery also hosted exhibitions of the Italian Futurists, Kandinsky, van Gogh, the Belgians Ensor and van Rijsselberghe, French artists Emile Bernard and Odilon Redon.⁸ The Museum Boymans in Rotterdam (founded 1849), houses one of the most important art collections in the Netherlands.

The group known as *De Branding* (“The Surf”), led by artist Herman Bieling (1887–1964) was founded in Rotterdam in 1917. *De Branding* advocated Theosophy (as did Mondrian and some of the expatriate artists in Bali), and dabbled in the occult. Under the auspices of *De Branding* the Netherlands first saw the work of Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi, and that of artist, graphic designer, typographer, set designer and sound poet Kurt Schwitters, both central figures in European abstract modernism.⁹ A large number of modern architects were attracted by the massive port expansion that between 1860 and 1910 saw the population of Rotterdam grow from 100,000 to 400,000.¹⁰

When Schoon arrived in Rotterdam, the younger generation of the city’s cultural élite were being brought together by groups such as the architectural society *De Opbouw*, the Rotterdam Film League and the Brusse publishing

⁷ S. D. Muller (Ed.), *Dutch Art: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997, p. 334.

⁸ Muller, pp. 335–336.

⁹ Muller, p. 336.

¹⁰ J. Turner (Ed.), *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, Vol. 15. London & New York: Macmillan, 1996, p. 230.

house. These organisations were linked through their Communist sympathies.¹¹ Young Theo may well have been attracted to this milieu as something quite unlike life in Java.

There is a photograph of Schoon in the collection of Auckland Art Gallery's Research Library, which, judging by his apparent age, seems to date from around this period. He is wearing a tie, with a sleeveless pullover over his shirt, and appears to be cultivating the appearance of a young dandy, a young provincial from the colonies prepared to take on the big city.

Schoon at the Academy

In 1931, aged around sixteen, Schoon is said to have enrolled at the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten en Technische in Rotterdam, which Willem de Kooning, later to become famous as a central figure of American Abstract Expressionism in the mid-twentieth century, had earlier attended.¹² Unfortunately, most of the Academy's records from 1851–1940 were destroyed by bombing during the Second World War,¹³ but by examining what de Kooning has said of the Academy, we learn something of the education which prepared Schoon as an artist.¹⁴

The Dutch training system integrated fine and applied arts and craft with classes in lettering, perspective, life and still-life drawing, courses in marbling and wood-graining, and art history and theory. There existed in the Netherlands a tacit understanding between guilds (professional organisations) and academies, dating back to the Golden Age of Dutch art, that a standard of quality only could be taught, not originality as such. De Kooning recalls that:

When we went to the Academy—doing painting, decorating, making a living—young artists were not interested in painting *per se*. We used to call that 'good for men with beards.' And the idea of a palette, with colours on it,

¹¹ Boijmans Museum website.

¹² De Kooning was attending evening classes. The school is now named the Willem de Kooning Academy in his honour.

¹³ Peter Sauerbier, interview with D. Skinner, 26 Jan 1999, Tape 1, Side A, 16.20, Theo Schoon Oral History Project, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington;; Wilma Knol (Librarian, Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam), email to author, 2 Oct 2002.

¹⁴ D. Sylvester, "Flesh was the Reason." In *Willem De Kooning, Paintings*. Washington, New Haven & London: National Gallery of Art & Yale University Press, 1995, p. 15.

was rather silly ... The idea of being a modern person wasn't really being an artist in the sense of being a painter.¹⁵

According to de Kooning, it was quite common at the Academy for students at the time to attempt Impressionism and the style of Mondrian. He recalls that he became aware of Mondrian and Frank Lloyd Wright through Bernard Romein, the Art Director of a Rotterdam department store that hired him as a commercial artist in 1920.¹⁶ Clearly the commercial pulse and practical spirit of Rotterdam drew it to progressive and fast-paced aspects of modern art.

We perhaps learn more about the Academy from one of the earliest surviving works by de Kooning, *Still Life: Bowl, Pitcher and Jug*,¹⁷ painted there around 1921. This work reflects a deeply academic training: a highly traditional composition, firmly modelled forms and a play of light reminiscent of the Dutch old masters.¹⁸ De Kooning recalled that drawing was to be completed with a series of minute *conté* crayon dots and points to give surfaces the illusion of faithful *trompe-l'oeil* textureless reproduction. Something of this, particularly the textural stipple, can be identified in Schoon's figurative paintings¹⁹—this feature being a guild “secret”—excluding the artist's personality and individual “handwriting”. By obeying these rules, the artist could “succeed” as a commercial artist. De Kooning also recalled a professor who admonished his students gathered around a still-life study object, “ ‘Draw without Ideas! Draw what you see, not what you think’.”²⁰ It was therefore a particularly traditional training based in observation, life drawing and technique.

The training was intensive. Schoon wrote of it to Michael Dunn in 1964:

¹⁵ D. Sylvester, “Content is a Glimpse ...” *Location* 1, Spring 1963, p. 45.

¹⁶ “Willem the Walloper.” *Time*, 30 April 1951, p. 63; M. Boudrez, “De Kooning, Painter of Promise: A Dutch Rebel on His Way to the Top.” *Knickerbocker* 12, May 1950, p. 8.

¹⁷ *Conté* and charcoal on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

¹⁸ D. Waldman, *Willem De Kooning*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1988, p. 5.

¹⁹ Ron Brownson, conversation with author, Dec 2002.

²⁰ P. Cummings, “The Drawings of Willem de Kooning.” In *Willem de Kooning*, New York, Munich & London: Whitney Museum of American Art, Prestel-Verlag & W. W. Norton & Co., 1984, p. 11.

Your legacy [New Zealand] is one of mediocrity and bad teaching—mine was the burden of getting too much rammed down my throat, without a decent chance to digest it, or to orientate myself.²¹

The Academy's syllabus touched on the Bauhaus and early European modernism.²² It was also at this time Schoon developed his interest in Klee, Kandinsky and Mondrian. It seems, however, that Schoon's knowledge of these movements came more from his own reading in the Academy library than from his actual schooling,²³ probably from magazines and journals such as *De Stijl* and *Merz*.

The De Stijl-influenced photographer/typographer Piet Zwart taught at the Academy at the time Schoon was a student. Zwart proposed the radical reorganisation of art education, in which the role of painting would cease to exist and greater emphasis would be placed on "modern methods of reproduction" such as photography and film. Zwart, along with Wally Elenbaas, Joost Elffers, Paul Schuitema (1912–1965) and Jacob Jongert were promoters of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), which saw the camera as a candid and unsentimental eye incapable of the Romantic indulgences of previous periods.

These photographers were interested in photographic social realism, and developing complex compositions dominated by diagonals that were abstract works in themselves. After the stock market crash of 1929, Schuitema, Elenbaas, Elffers and Zwart joined the workers' and writers' collective *Links Richten* ('Aim' or 'Look' Left), collaborating on the magazine of the same name published during the years 1932–33.²⁴ Zwart had been one of the prime typographic exponents of De Stijl from 1921, and in 1931 he spent some time as a typographer with the Bauhaus at Dessau in Germany.²⁵

²¹ T. Schoon, letter to M. Dunn, 11 Dec 1964, p. 5.

²² Sauerbier, Tape 1, Side A. 14.40.

²³ Kees Hos, interview with D. Skinner, 17 Feb 2000. Tape 1, Side A, 12.40 & 13.00, Theo Schoon Oral History Project. Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library. A work by Schoon entitled *Untitled After Kandinsky* (undated) sold in 1988. (J. Daly-Peoples, "Top Art Market Works Well Without Help." *National Business Review* 18 Sept 1998.)

²⁴ Boijmans Museum website.

²⁵ E. Benezit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, Vol. 14. Paris: Gründ, 1999, p. 949.

Was Schoon involved in any way with these photographers? He would presumably have had direct contact with Zwart at the Academy, and was almost certainly instructed by him in photography. Affinities between the abstract photographic compositions of these Dutch avant-garde pioneers and Schoon's brilliant images of geothermal structures in the North Island, New Zealand.

It seems quite possible that Zwart might have introduced the young Schoon to the work of such Bauhaus innovators and teachers of photography as Lucia Moholy, László Moholy-Nagy and Walter Peter Hans (the three dominant names in Bauhaus photography in the 1920s and 1930s), Herbert Schürmann, Eugen Batz, Herbert Bavarian, Marianne Brandt, Eric Consemüller, Eugen Batz, György Kepes, Nathan Lerner, Henry Holmes Smith and members of the Feininger family. Like the Bauhaus, Zwart at this time strongly opposed traditional approaches to decorative arts and promoted industrial design. He often worked in interior design, and at this period collaborated with a number of Dutch design firms, including Huszár and Bruynzeel, as well as being a member of the Association of Revolutionary Socialist Intellectuals.²⁶

Photography began to be accepted as an artistic medium in the Netherlands in the mid to late 1920s with the rise of a new generation of photographers and *Nieuwe Fotografie* (New Photography, the equivalent of the Straight Photography of the United States). Zwart was one of those leading the vanguard of the movement, along with Gerrit Kiljan (1891–1968) and Schuitema. These revolutionaries held photography to be superior to all other art forms because it both encompassed all the tones of grey between black and white, unlike other graphic techniques, and because it was ultimately faithful to the material. The aesthetic of *Nieuwe Fotografie* consisted of avoidance of compositional framing, rhythmic repetition of forms, small details of previously uninvestigated ordinary objects (a woodworking industrial plant in Zwart's case), and either very high or very low points of view. These contributed to abstract works rendered as the camera “sees” a detail of an

²⁶ F. Leidelmeijer (Ed.), *Avant-Garde Design: Dutch Decorative Arts 1880-1940*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1997, p. 246.

object.²⁷ Schoon's abstract photographs—which the New Zealand art community found so radical—may be described as influenced by *Nieuwe Fotografie*.

Zwart might have introduced Schoon to Rotterdam artist/designers like Hendrik Chabot (1894-1949), a De Stijl and Cubist inspired painter, and the eclectic Expressionist Jaap Gidding (1887-1955).²⁸

Foundations to Schoon's Practice

Schoon's artistic output when he first arrived in New Zealand was unremarkable in its pictorial figurativeness, remaining faithful to what he had learned in Rotterdam and employed in Bandung. It is possible to glean something of his traditional practice by examining his influence on Gordon Walters, something to which the latter was receptive as Schoon represented the sophistication and worldliness of Europe.²⁹ This is apparent in a series of early conté drawings by Walters, which Francis Pound suggests show a distinct "Schoonian" influence. *Cast of an Indonesian Head (profile)* (probably either Pound's or Walters' title of a later date, ca.1942) was almost certainly made of a cast in Schoon's collection. *Stones* (ca.1943) is very similar to Schoon's *trouve* collections of stones (often intentionally phallic) as in *Untitled (stones)* (c.1950) (Fig. 7).³⁰ Michael Dunn has suggested that the phallic shapes of such stones, gourds, and the vagina-like forms of sponges and driftwood might be a sublimation of the prudish underlying sexuality of New Zealand in the 1950s.³¹ More likely, these works find their roots in the biomorphic surrealism of Arp and Tanguy, which Schoon would have learned about in Europe.

²⁷ Muller, p. 282.

²⁸ Leidelmeijer et al, pp. 211 and 217.

²⁹ M. Dunn, "Statements by Gordon Walters." In M. Dunn (Ed.), *Gordon Walters, A Festschrift*. Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983[a], p. 123.

³⁰ F. Pound, "Emerging Abstraction." In the catalogue *New Zealand Home & Building: The Newstalk 1ZB 1950s Show*. Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki and Robin Beckett, 1992[b], p. 40.

³¹ M. Dunn, 1993, p. 47.

As Pound has pointed out, the use of *conté* and the drawing from casts and of still life subjects is particularly (to use his term) “Old Masterish”,³² something fitting the kind of training one could expect from a pragmatic institution like the Rotterdam Academy. When Schoon first commenced his rock art work, he went to considerable trouble to make his studies accurate and realistic copies of what he saw on the rock. Excellent examples of this are his earliest renderings of rock drawings from Craigmore in South Canterbury.³³ “This painting reproduces almost exactly this most important group—even to the background texture of the rock and the flaking of the surface which has carried away some of the pigment.”³⁴ Naturally this kind of detailed rendering, reflecting an intensive training in graphic art, reminds us of the first great epoch of Dutch painting beginning in the seventeenth century, exemplified by the genres of still life and the domestic interior scene.

Schoon and Dutch Modernism

In the Netherlands, Schoon was in direct contact with avant-garde modernists. The Dutch have played an important role as catalyst in the development of “Modern art”. Though Paris and, to a lesser extent, Dresden, Munich, Milan, Barcelona, and Vienna were the main centres of European modernism, in terms of general appreciation by the public, the Dutch were at the forefront. As the French avant-garde poet-critic Guillaume Apollinaire noted as early as 1913, the Cubists could not even get a foothold in the major Paris galleries, while in the galleries of Amsterdam, Picassos were to be found sharing wall space with Rembrandts.³⁵ Rotterdam was particularly well placed in its proximity to these centres of modern art with Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam all being within easy reach by train. No cosmopolitan artist of earnest ambition, living in the Netherlands from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, could have remained ignorant of modernist trends.

³² Pound, 1993, p. 47.

³³ Now in the collections of Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

³⁴ M. Trotter and B. McCulloch, “Maori Rock Drawings.” In N. Roberts (Ed.), *Maori Rock Drawing, The Theo Schoon Interpretations*. Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1985, (no page number).

Schoon would have known about the Barbizon, Rembrandt and Millet-influenced Hague School. It probably formed as substantial a part of his academic training as the late development Golden Age Dutch painting, and Dutch colonials would have had similar works in their homes in Java and Bali. The leading artist of The Hague school was Jozef Israels (1824–1911), one of the premier late nineteenth century genre artists.

Petrus van der Velden, Israels' pupil and an associate of this group, is a name very familiar to New Zealand art history. His contribution to art in Christchurch, and New Zealand as a whole, was extremely important. He arrived in Christchurch in 1890 bringing the concerns and attitudes of one of Europe's most highly regarded art movements and, Rodney Wilson asserts, introduced the concept of the "professional artist" to the youthful artistic community.³⁶ Although largely forgotten in the Netherlands, the name would be impressed upon Schoon at the Canterbury School of Art, as one of the most important painters in the region's history.

In 1882, van der Velden met van Gogh in The Hague,³⁷ one of the most important figures in the history of modern Dutch art as Schoon well would have known through his studies. Van Gogh, the only Dutch post-impressionist, may, like Schoon, be described as an "outsider" artist. This was something Schoon seems to have appreciated when he wrote, "How discretely has the factor of insanity been hushed, even in art literature, in the case of Vincent van Gogh, Herman Kruidier and so many others."³⁸ Van Gogh, as Schoon would in his own career, took on the line and rhythm of the Asian art, although in the former's case at second hand through the medium of Japanese prints.

³⁵ E. Cahm, "Revolt, Conservatism and Reaction in Paris 1905–25." In M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane (Eds.), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 165.

³⁶ T. L. Rodney Wilson, "Velden, Petrus van der 1837-1913." In *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. II, 1870–1900*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books & New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, 1993. pp. 557–558.

³⁷ V. van Gogh, letter to T. van Gogh, 11 July 1883, available online <http://webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/12/299.htm>

³⁸ T. Schoon, letter to A. R. D. Fairburn, 22 March 1950, p. 4. University of Auckland Library, A125.17.1.

Java at this time was, once more, stoking the European imagination, through the Paris *Expositions Universelles* of 1878, 1889 and 1900. Paul Gauguin at the 1889 Exposition was enthralled by the small “Kampong” or Javanese model village, established by some Dutch businessmen to promote their products.³⁹ Gauguin was enthralled by photographs he possessed of the replica of Borobudur constructed at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, and painted his Tahitian models in a system of proportions developed from the temple’s relief carvings.⁴⁰ David Sweetman imagines Gauguin at the mock village:

[T]his was a simple affair of bamboo and thatch with a chief’s stilt house and various huts—one a restaurant serving Javanese delicacies, another offering Van Houten Cocoa and Lucas Bols Spirits, but to attract the passers-by, the organisers had brought over sixty-five Javanese who lived in the Kampong during the exhibition, amongst whom was a troupe of temple dancers, little girls aged from twelve to sixteen, dressed in exquisitely bejewelled costumes, performing temple dances whose movements mirrored the Khmer figures on the temple next door ... Not that his [Gauguin’s] interest in the exhibition was constantly high-minded—the pleasure he found in the little Javanese dancers, moving with infinitely slow precision through the ordained angular patterns of their “Hindu” dances was no doubt as much corporeal as spiritual. In one of the publicity photographs, two of the dancers are shown in performance, their fingers impossibly bent back, trained since earliest childhood to transform their slender limbs into living statues, a strangely unnerving blend of art and childlike sensuality.⁴¹

Schoon was to attempt to fuse Javanese and European artistic traditions to create a new kind of art, but he was by no means the first modern artist to do so. Jan Toorop (1858–1928) would certainly have been a name familiar to Schoon. Born in Purworedjo, Central Java, to a Dutch father and a Javanese mother, Toorop represents an artistic link between the Netherlands and the distant colony with which Schoon may well have identified. As one of the foremost Symbolist artists, Toorop is an important precursor of later modernism. It seems unusual that such an avant-garde artist could have originated in as “un-modern” an environment as provincial Central Java.

Toorop trained in drawing under H. J. van der Weele in The Hague in 1875 and studied in Delft from 1876 to 1878. After 1880 he attended the Rijksacademie,

³⁹ D. Sweetman, *Paul Gauguin: A Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pp. 226–227.

⁴⁰ B. Dorival, “Sources of the Art of Gauguin from Java, Egypt and Ancient Greece.” *Burlington Magazine* 93, April 1951, pp. 18–122.

⁴¹ Sweetman, pp. 226–227.

Amsterdam. In 1882, he went to Brussels. At this stage in his career, Toorop's main influences were the Realism of Gustave Courbet and the Impressionism of James Ensor. During a stay in England from 1883 to 1885 he met Whistler and Matthijs Maris, and in Paris in 1885 he encountered the Pointillism of Seurat. He met with Pre-Raphaelite William Morris in 1889 and from 1890 onward he began producing the works that would connect his name with the Symbolist movement⁴² including *The Sphinx* (1892–1897), *O Grave, Where is Thy Victory?* (1897) and *The Three Brides* (1893).⁴³ In these works, the attenuated, graceful figures seem clearly derived from traditional Javanese shadow puppets and batik, and the organic line of Art Nouveau.⁴⁴

In later years Toorop would co-curate an exhibition of van Gogh in The Hague in 1892, and made contact with the likes of the poet Paul Verlaine and the Salon de la Rose+Croix in France, indicating the same kind of rebellion against the bourgeoisie that we find in Schoon's life. From 1900 to 1902 Toorop exhibited with the decadent Vienna Secession artists as one influenced by Gustav Klimt, an artist occasionally identified as a Symbolist. From 1911, Toorop handed on the modernist baton to Mondrian, and took the chair as professor of the *Moderne Kunstkring* (Modern Art Circle) in Amsterdam. In 1915, the year of Schoon's birth, he converted to Roman Catholicism and created a series of works on mystico-religious themes.⁴⁵

Toorop died in The Hague in 1928, the year after Schoon arrived in Rotterdam. No doubt the death of the famous artist would have been much discussed in Dutch artistic circles. It would have been quite natural for the young colonial to identify himself with the half-Javanese painter. Schoon fantasised about being Eurasian—as he once wrote, “I can assure you, that I am only Dutch by half.”⁴⁶ What Schoon later came to share with Toorop in aesthetic, is a profoundly eccentric practice: the simplification of form (which is, in effect, a more elaborate complication of form); a tendency to design rather than paint; an

⁴² Muller, p. 387.

⁴³ Coloured drawing, 78 x 98 cm. Kroller-Muller Foundation, Otterlo, Netherlands.

⁴⁴ Muller, p. 387.

⁴⁵ Muller, p. 387.

unusual realisation of the drawing as artwork rather than merely another step toward a painting; the flattening of space and the evocative power of line, as well as an almost musical organisation of composition using imagery not unlike the Wagnerian *leitmotif*.

What is most fascinating about Toorop, however, is the synthesis he created out of the proto-modernism of the symbolist movement and his own ethnic heritage. Modern art therefore owes much to the stylised forms of Javanese art, less acknowledged than African and Oceanic art have been in the context of primitivism and surrealism. Paradoxes such as this have led writers like Dr R. Williams to question the nature of modernism:

Of course Modernism and Modernity as aesthetic terms do not really spring from circumstances in the artistic cultures of non-Western cultures ("Western" being a construct dating back to the Classical Greco-Roman period). "Modernism" as a title for a whole cultural movement ... has been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of "modern" or even "absolute modern", between, say, 1890 and 1940.⁴⁷

This has been the traditional understanding of the modernist "formalesque" (to use Dr Bernard Smith's term⁴⁸), but not an altogether accurate one. Many of the influences behind Schoon were neither especially modern, nor academic. This position also ignores phenomena such as the indigenous hybrids of modernism and traditional practice that flourished in Bali and would possibly have been an influence on Schoon. As contemporary Indonesian art critic Jim Supangkat asserts:

Modernism is not an absolute concept, nor is it the opposite of tradition. It is also not just based on a Modernistic philosophy (with a capital M!) In this context, Modernism is a pluralistic phenomenon. It is a principle that originates in the tradition of European High Art, which in fact interacts with local conditions all over the world thus creating a modernism that is

⁴⁶ T. Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, not dated. MS 61, p. 1, n. 16, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

⁴⁷ R. Williams, "When was modernism?" In F. Frascina and J. Harris (Eds.), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*. London: Phaidon Press, 1992, pp. 23–27.

⁴⁸ B. Smith, "The Formalesque Style." *Science and Society Conference Proceedings, Social Theory and Policy-Making in a Globalising, Postmodern Australia*. Online, Available http://www.wistp.murdoch.edu.au/publications/e_public/amhope/smith.html

multifaceted ... This logically contradicts the belief in the correctness of the monolinearity of the development of Modern art, as a historical process.⁴⁹

The aims of modernist abstraction have in most cases been trans-national, and often metaphysical, in their attempt to transcend the grip of language, national history, representation and space/time.

This fits comfortably with Schoon's eclectic interest in South-East and East Asia, Māori and the Bauhaus. Much of European and American abstraction often seems to have developed from Western-internationalist trends to mysticism. In the West, even the Classical world's depiction of its myths and personifications involve various strata of abstraction. Understandably a well-travelled, multi-lingual and apparently cosmopolitan figure (in comparison to much of New Zealand at the time) like Schoon, particularly with his Eastern background, might be drawn to mysticism as an alternative to the necessities of mundane New Zealand life.

The flourishing of mysticism between 1880 and 1930 is often apparent in abstract art. Kandinsky studied popular Russian illustrations of the Biblical Book of Revelations, and the Russian Symbolists were closely connected with the Pan-Slavic Esoteric Movement.⁵⁰ Schoon's consistent references to the spiritual and "magical" nature of "Moa Hunter" rock drawings, for example, would strongly suggest that he identified himself with the animism of that culture, particularly as a by-product of his immersed existence in the mystical meltingpot of Bali.

The Dutch modernists have been mostly painters rather than sculptors—something perhaps reinforced by a lack in the Low Countries of the classic media of sculpture (wood and stone) and a tradition of intensely mercantile democracy, Puritanism and deeply entrenched Protestant anti-monumental/iconoclastic temperament. At the time he was in Rotterdam, in the late 1920s–early 1930s, the dominant idioms in Netherlandish art were those of

⁴⁹ J. Supangkat, "Knowing and Understanding the Differences." *Orientation*. Amsterdam: The Gate Foundation, 1995.

⁵⁰ M. Tuchman (Ed.), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting: 1980–1925*. New York Abbeville Press, 1987, pp. 165–184, 219–238.

Expressionism and more-or-less-traditional realism (Dada and Surrealism having made relatively little impact). The two chief modern Dutch painters of the time were Herman Kruidier (1881–1935), whose fascination with peasant life in a lyrical–grotesque mode may have in a small way informed Schoon’s interest in ethnicity, and Charley Toorop (1891–1955), daughter of Jan Toorop, who at times flirted with elements of the abstract and Surreal.⁵¹ These would have been the artists Schoon most associated with Dutch modernism.

Of direct relevance to Schoon, particularly because of Zwart’s probable influence, was De Stijl, which began as a movement in the summer of 1917, two years after Schoon was born. It included painters, sculptors, architects and writers. Founded by Theo van Doesburg (an active member until his death in 1931) in order to “make a contribution to the development of a new awareness of beauty ... to make modern man more receptive to what is new in the visual arts.”⁵² This is a sentiment with which Schoon would have identified, given his eventual adopted role as missionary of modernist art to New Zealand.

De Stijl was one of the most important expressions of the avant-garde in Europe. A number of the group’s members were linked to Rotterdam. Antony Kok was born there in 1882 as was Robert van’t Hoff in 1887. De Stijl’s founder Theo van Doesburg was born nearby in Utrecht in 1883. Cornelis van Eesteren studied architecture at the Academy at the end of the nineteenth century. Mondrian exhibited there. Jacobus Oud was City Architect of Rotterdam from 1918 to 1933, coinciding with Schoon’s stay, which means that Schoon was in Rotterdam during one of the most significant episodes in the history of modern Dutch architecture.⁵³ De Stijl’s magazine was also widely available at the time.

Schoon, from his Rotterdam period onward, was certainly interested in Mondrian.⁵⁴ What he seems to have taken from Mondrian is the creation of sensations of balance in the picture plane through the use of contrasting

⁵¹ Tuchman et al., p. 184.

⁵² H. L. C. Jaffe, *De Stijl*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1967, pp. 9–10.

⁵³ Jaffe, pp. 246–252.

⁵⁴ Hos, Tape 1, Side A, 21.40.

“weighted” colour densities and visual rhythms within grids. Clearly the linear “drawn” nature of Schoon’s art post-Hattaway shows correspondences with Mondrian drawings.⁵⁵ Mondrian recognised this *disegno* in his own work.⁵⁶ De Stijl centred very much around Mondrian’s Neoplasticism, which drew on the Fauvists and Cubism, and, indirectly, Malevich’s Suprematism, Architectonic Constructivism and Russian Futurism. As with Cubism, De Stijl practitioners tended to reinforce each other’s styles apart from superficial aesthetic similarities and an interest in synthetic/analytical form. In contrast to the alienated, individualist loner Schoon, De Stijl was largely about collectivism, depersonalisation and mathematical precision⁵⁷ —an antithesis to Schoon because it contradicts his later interest in the cultural distinctiveness and spirituality of Māori identity.

Schoon, in stark contrast to the ascetic and aesthetic puritanism of Walters, does seem not to have taken modernism very seriously at all. The titles for much of his work, rather than the more common ultra-modernist (if such he was) practice of referencing colour composition and series number, seem to make a joke of the deadly seriousness of modernism. For example, there is *One Man’s Picture is Another Man’s Rorschach* [sic] *Test* (1965) (Fig. 4)⁵⁸ and *Split Level Viewfinder* (1965),⁵⁹ both of which pun on Schoon’s relationship with psychiatric patient Rolfe Hattaway and Schoon’s own “double vision”. In *Done up in pins and curlers* (1965) (Fig. 8)⁶⁰ the rough forked lines and indistinctly bordered patches of colour reference but bifurcate into an all-consuming abstraction that hints at the “Dream Paintings” of Joan Miro. This work in particular is also highly comparable with images like Paul Klee’s *Forking in 4/4 Time* (1937)⁶¹ and *A Place for a French Horn* (1939)⁶² with their expressive lines fulfilling a rhythmic function. In both works, as with Schoon,

⁵⁵ H. Holtzman, *Mondrian: The Process Works*. New York: Pace, 1970.

⁵⁶ Mondrian described his earlier work, in contrast to the later *New York City* and *Boogie-Woogie*, as “too tragic” and with “still too much drawing in it”. (Holtzman, p. 3.)

⁵⁷ P. Mondrian, *Home-Street-City* (1926) in Holtzman, p. 3

⁵⁸ PVA & paint, on board, 147 x 122 cm, Jenny Gibbs Collection, Auckland.

⁵⁹ PVA on board, 157 x 121.5 cm, Fletcher Challenge Collection, Auckland.

⁶⁰ Oil on paper, 61 x 48 cm, Paris Family Collection, Wellington.

⁶¹ Watercolour paste and charcoal on paper, 30.5 x 23.5 cm, Private Collection, Switzerland. Schoon was very interested in South-East Asian music and African drums. (Sauerbier, Tape 1, Side B, 8.00.)

colour is little more than a filler (in contrast with Klee's *Park near Lucerne*⁶³ where colour is very intense). Both Klee and Schoon share certain musical proclivities—in Schoon's case percussive.

Schoon does, however, share with De Stijl the conscious abstraction of aesthetics to their essential nature, something similar to what he saw in traditional Māori imagery with the stylisation of form for a spiritual purpose. De Stijl sought to free itself from the natural appearance, but also tried to establish visual equilibriums with line and pure colour that is, in a way, not dissimilar to Schoon's output. (One could quite happily compare Bart van der Leek's *Still Life with Wine Bottle* (1922) or any of Theo van Doesburg's *Composition XIII* variations of 1918.)⁶⁴ On the other hand, Schoon's intuitive methodology and interest in the "Other" would no doubt have offended Mondrian's aesthetic sensibilities.

But of even greater importance than De Stijl to Schoon, was the Bauhaus. In 1985 he wrote:

There were two factors which determined the nature and character of my recent work with plaster stamps in ceramics. *The first was a training in Holland in graphic design, the second was a strong influence by the legacy of the Bauhaus.* [italics mine] All arts and crafts of any consequence of the last fifty years owe a debt to this legacy. Among its many contributors to modern art has been a process of incisive analysis and synthesis which brings real understanding and clarity to the study of the structure of art. Without this event in art, the exploration of the art of mankind on a global scale would have been impossible. The art of other races and cultures can only be assimilated intelligently with the tools the Bauhaus provided.⁶⁵

From this passage, written by Schoon in an article on pottery, it seems he definitely saw the Bauhaus as a useful tool for a broader cultural assimilation. It implies a modernist agenda—the homogenisation of non-Western cultures into one modernist, secular super-culture.

⁶² Charcoal on paper, 29.4 x 20.7 cm, Private collection, Switzerland.

⁶³ Oil on newspaper on burlap (1938), 100 x 70cm, Kunstmuseum, Berne, Paul-Klee-Stiftung.

⁶⁴ Jaffe, pp. 49–55.

⁶⁵ T. Schoon, "My Work with Plaster Stamps." *New Zealand Potter* 2, 1985, p. 20.

The Bauhaus principles as established by Gropius, are summarised by Alfred Barr, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art 1938, in his preface to the book *Bauhaus* (edited by Gropius and Bayer):

- Most students should face the fact that their future should be involved primarily with industry and mass production, rather than with individual craftsmanship.
- Teachers in schools of design should be men who are in advance of their profession rather than safely and academically in the rear guard.
- The schools of design should, as the Bauhaus did, bring together the various arts of painting, architecture, theatre, photography, weaving, typography, etc., into a modern synthesis which disregards conventional distinctions between the "fine" and "applied" arts.
- It is harder to design a first rate chair than to paint a second rate painting-and much more useful.
- A school of design should have on its faculty the purely creative and disinterested artist such as the easel painter as a spiritual counterpoint to the practical technician in order that they may work and teach side by side for the benefit of the student.
- Manual experience of materials is essential to the student of design-experience at first confined to free experiment and then extended to the practical workshop.
- The study of rational design in terms of techniques and materials should be only the first step in the development of a new and modern sense of beauty.
- Because we live in the 20th century, the student architect or designer should be offered no refuge in the past but should be equipped for the modern world in its various aspects, artistic, technical, social, economic, spiritual, so that he may function in society not as a decorator but as a vital participant.⁶⁶

Schoon learned about the Bauhaus from his own reading in the Rotterdam Academy's library, and adopted many of their principles. Most probably he would have encountered the series of eighteen *Bauhausbücher* published between 1925 and 1930. General literature on the Bauhaus was widely available in various languages, including volumes written by Dutch authors like Mondrian, van Doesburg and Oud. Schoon would almost certainly have read articles by Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, Schlemmer, Klee and Kandinsky on Bauhaus practices.⁶⁷ The Bauhaus synthesis of art and craft, and Walter Gropius' call to return to the workshop seems to have made a lasting

⁶⁶ A. Barr, "Preface." In W. Gropius and H. Bayer, *Bauhaus*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938, piii

⁶⁷ Klaus Weber (Curator of the Bauhaus Archive, Museum fuer Gestaltung, Berlin), email to author, 1 Nov 2002.

impression on the young Schoon, allowing him to explore other avenues of artistic expression such as the gourd and pounamu carving later on in New Zealand.

[T]he distinction between fine art and arts & crafts has faded away. Artists have become glass blowers, jewellers, weavers and potters, opening up new frontiers in ancient crafts, giving it new life and vigour—and they have gained international success. We've got it right now. Art is the head, and craft is the tail of one and the same animal. Without the head—the tail doesn't wag any more.⁶⁸

It is important to place Schoon's interest in these indigenous practices within the context of a broader modernist agenda. Many modernist designers and artists had no problematic issues in working in both art and craft. Picasso worked extensively with ceramicists Georges and Susanne Raimé at their Madoura workshop in Golfe Juan, on the edge of Valouris, France, from 1946. Frances Hodgkins designed wallpaper in Europe in the early twentieth century. English artists Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Wyndham Lewis and Henri Gaudier-Brezska produced furniture, textiles and ceramics through Roger Fry's Omega Workshops (1913-1920). Fernand Leger designed tapestries for the five-century-old Tabard Frères et Soeurs factory in Aubusson, France, and Jean Cocteau tried his hand at almost everything. Even Le Corbusier, who contrary to the position of the Bauhaus and De Stijl, saw industrial design as the death of "decorative art" in the commonly accepted sense of the term, designed furniture and furnishings for his extraordinary buildings. It was a return of sorts to the pre-Romantic understanding of the synonymy of "artist" and "artisan".

European artists have a mortal fear of the "decorative", it is a dirty word. As someone born in the east, this puritanical fear of the decorative has always struck me as very comical. The main reason for this pathological fear is the fearful decadence of European decorative art in the last six centuries which could only be obliterated by a very violent reaction. Decorative art in the east has never been burdened with a guilt complex.⁶⁹

Here Schoon shows sympathies with certain attitudes of Italian Futurism and Primitivism, but for us, the central relevance is his self-declaration as a designer.

⁶⁸ T. Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, 24 Nov 1967, MS 61, 2, p. 7. Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.

For many modern designers—and myself [Schoon]—these dual factors of analysis and synthesis have played a major role in the study and assimilation of many art forms which have so far remained outside the realm of academic European art. Only the strictly formal abstract artists have been able to crack the codes of this wide range of man's art, geographically as well as in the context of time. The Bauhaus approach brings a sharper understanding of this thing called style, as well as aesthetics. Whenever art forms, trends or theories of the last few decades have ignored these fundamental and universal factors in art, they have been sawing off the crutch they stand on.⁷⁰

The Bauhaus preliminary courses or *Vorkurs* demanded the analysis of all art in terms of rhythmic lines intended to encapsulate the expression and energy of the original.⁷¹ Analysis and Synthesis are principles discussed thoroughly by Kandinsky throughout his Bauhaus writings. Perhaps the strongest characteristic of Schoon's art is his use of sinuous, rhythmic line.

Schoon was also aware of Cubism. Later, in Wellington, he would translate passages of Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) aloud for Gordon Walters.⁷² *Negerplastik* was an account of African sculpture viewed from the perspective of Cubism.⁷³ It also contained examples of Oceanic material.⁷⁴

Rarely, however, does Cubism intrude in any of Schoon's surviving work. His preferences clearly lay with Post-Cubists like Kandinsky and Klee.

While Schoon was busy with his studies, Europe was changing. The Nazi party was on the rise in Germany. National Socialist ideology condemned modernist abstraction as debased, decadent and "Semitic". In 1933, the Bauhaus was shut down by the Nazis. This attitude was to culminate in the infamous *Degenerate*

⁶⁹ T. Schoon, letter to Virginia Umberger, 5 April 1964, MS 51, p. 2. Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.

⁷⁰ T. Schoon, 1985, p. 20.

⁷¹ F. Whitford, *Bauhaus*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1984, p. 55.

⁷² F. Pound, "'Something of what I lacked': A Group of forty-one unknown early works by Gordon Walters." *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* 20, 1999, p. 47.

⁷³ J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 130. Carl Einstein based much of his work on Cubism on first hand experience with Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and other Cubist artists. Other relevant texts in this area include L. Meffre [Trans.], *Carl Einstein and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Correspondence 1921-1939*. Marseille: André Dimanche, 1993; and W. E. Drewes, "Max Raphael und Carl Einstein: Konstellationen des Aufbruchs in die <<Klassische Moderns>> in Zeichen der Zeit." *Etudes Germaniques* 53, No. 1, Jan-March 1998, pp. 123-158.

Art Exhibition held in Munich and Berlin in 1937. From 1933, many artists fled occupied countries for the Netherlands, which itself would eventually be occupied in 1940 while Rotterdam was bombed to rubble by the Luftwaffe on the 14 May 1940. The massive Dutch exodus to the United States from this period onward helped cement the position of New York as the capital of Western art to the present day.

⁷⁴ W. Rubin (Ed.), *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art, Vol. 1*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984, p. 74, n. 12.

CHAPTER 4

RETURN TO THE DUTCH EAST-INDIES: THE BANDUNG PERIOD 1936–1939

Schoon and His New Indonesian Identity

Early in 1936, Theo Schoon arrived back in Java. A snapshot¹ shows him wearing sandals and white tropicals, lounging in a deck chair on a lawn backed with exotic trees. At the back of the chair is part of a shipping tag of some kind, which reads “Rotterdam Lloyd...” This would seem to be a fairly deliberate, almost certainly staged statement of Schoon’s arrival back in Java. Perhaps he intended to send this photograph to friends left behind in Rotterdam.

Once reunited with his parents, he chose not to settle in his birthplace of Kebumen. Instead, he took up residence in Bandung, the bustling capital of West Java and second largest city after Jakarta, where he had gained a position with the Dutch shipping line *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maats* (KPM). At KPM he was employed in the production of tourist publicity material, a job for which he had been well trained at the Academy in Rotterdam. We may surmise that this job took him all around the ancient heritage sites of Java and the tropical tourist resorts of Bali, gathering visual information for posters and brochures. Schoon at this time was very active in his own artistic practice. He established his own studio for himself in Bandung, and there is a suggestion that he undertook further art training.² His subject matter included landscapes and cultural scenes from Java and Bali. A Schoon photograph that probably dates to this period (circa 1938) depicts the monumental figure of Buddha in the Chandi Mendut temple, five kilometres east of Borobudur. (Fig. 10)³

At the time Bandung was a major centre of cultural and political activity, a university garden city, and node of industry 150 kilometres southeast of

¹ Research Library Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

² Sauerbier, 16.20.

Jakarta. Located at a high altitude and surrounded by mountains, Bandung has a cooler, more European climate than any other city in the Dutch East Indies, which made it popular with well-heeled Dutch colonists. The city became prosperous when a rail line was built, connecting the quinine, tea and coffee plantations of Bandung to Jakarta, in 1880. Hotels, cafes and exclusive European shops rapidly sprang up to service the newly wealthy planters, resulting in a very sophisticated and urbane cosmopolitan society.⁴

As a major cultural nexus, Bandung is renowned for its unique architecture—a fusion of functionalist Amsterdam School Art Deco (a reaction against the strict rationalist modernism of architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage in the 1920s and the final phase of European Art Deco lasting from 1910–1930), De Stijl and indigenous Hindu and Javanese styles. The Amsterdam School was both a plastic and organic expressionist architectural movement with reference to Frank Lloyd Wright and traditional craftsmanship. Architects like van der Mey, de Klerk, Luthman and Kramer became highly influential in Indonesia, incorporating such unusual influences as Sundanese roof-forms peculiar to western Java. Perhaps it has more in common with the Streamline “Ocean Liner” intermediate style than true Art Deco, but through these architects the influence of De Stijl permeated Bandung, and by implication, Schoon’s consciousness.⁵

It was also a time of revived interest in indigenous art practices, culminating in 1937 with the introduction of batik as part of the curriculum in schools for girls in Java.⁶ Probably it was in this period that Schoon began to distance himself from his Dutch heritage and take on the trappings of both the Javanese and Balinese. In numerous photographic portraits of Schoon, taken throughout his life in New Zealand, Schoon “play acts” his Indonesian identity. Examples of these are Spencer Digby’s photographs *Theo Schoon as a Javanese Dancer*

³ Collection of M. Dunn. Illustrated in Dunn, 2003, p. 86.

⁴ “An Extremely Brief Urban History of Bandung.” Online. Available <http://www.iis.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~fujimori/lsai/bandung.html>

⁵ D. Hartono, “Decorative Art in Architecture as Part of Bandung History.” Online. Available <http://www.iis.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~fujimori/heritage/artdeco.html>

(1944) (Fig. 11)⁷ and *Untitled Self-Portrait* (1941-42) (Fig. 12)⁸, and Zena Abbot's photograph of Schoon in costume at an Arts Ball at the "Peter Pan" in Upper Queen Street, Auckland.⁹ A less flamboyant but just as eccentric version of "Balinese" Schoon can be seen in the photographs *Self-Portrait with Balinese Mask* (1976) (Fig. 13) and *Self-Portrait* (1976) (Fig. 14).¹⁰ These works not only show Schoon identifying himself as and with the exotic Other, but also rehearsing the subtle ambiguities, tensions and interplay of identity through the use of mask, costume and the controlled and immediately identifiable poses and gestures of classical Balinese dance. Schoon was European, and therefore, of course, it must be read as masquerade.¹¹ No doubt the costume appealed to Schoon's flamboyance—one might even describe his costumes as a kind of "drag" – both sexually and culturally transgressive.¹² The effect is comparable to Nijinski in the highly coloured and ornate costumes designed by Leon Bakst for the *Ballets Russes* in early twentieth century Paris.

Schoon's Bandung Folios (1937),¹³ are an exception to this. Schoon does not place portraits of himself with those of dancers, the landscape and native people, and his self-portraits depict him exclusively as European in the colonial context of Western settings: studio and accommodation. Perhaps this implies an academic anthropological process, influenced by the photography of Walter Spies (then resident at Campuan, near Ubud) whom Schoon met.¹⁴ This was possible because the majority of Western artists in Java and Bali were kept in

⁶ Acting on the proposal of the Java Institute and its director Pangeran Professor Hussein Djajadiningrat, traditional applied art schools were also set up, teaching both silversmithing and wood carving. (Wagner, p. 226.)

⁷ Black and white, dimensions unknown, reproduced in *The Arts in New Zealand*, Dec 1944/Jan 1945, p. 42.

⁸ Black and white, 25.5 x 20 cm. Collection Auckland Art Gallery.

⁹ Reproduced in Rumsey, 1995a, p. 27.

¹⁰ Colour photo, 8 x 10 cm; and colour photograph transparency. Schoon Estate, Collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

¹¹ Skinner, 1999a, p. 68.

¹² Francis Pound calls this "cultural cross-dressing." Pound, *The Space Between: P•keh• Use of M•ori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art*. Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994, p. 79.

¹³ Black and white, each page 26.8 x 32.1 cm. Collection Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

¹⁴ Skinner, 1999a, p. 69.

contact by the *Kunstkringen* (Art Circles) that operated throughout the Dutch East Indies.¹⁵

The Bandung (or in Schoon's Dutch spelling, "Bandoeng") folios help us to build an image of Schoon's artistic life at around this date. There are two Bandung albums dating around 1937 and 1938. This contains a caricature of a fashionable young woman; various photographs of Schoon in his studio at Bandung (including one where Schoon is wearing a traditional Javanese garment as a painter's smock); Schoon squatting in the lotus position; Schoon with averted eyes, sunbathing in a loudly-printed bathing costume on some sand dunes (suggesting a figure study); and a later addition, a portrait of Schoon in traditional Balinese or Javanese garb, possibly taken by Spencer Digby, dated to January 1941. Another later addition bears an inscription that links Schoon with Auckland artist John Holmwood, probably around 1947. Each photograph demonstrates Schoon's precise virtuosity in the use of lighting and composition—skills he no doubt learned in Rotterdam.

From the folios, Schoon's Bandung studio appears to have been a place of serious artistic exploration rather than a fashionable diversion or venue for the mass production of saccharine images for the tourist market or KPM. The paintings on display in the studio do not appear to be eroticised, sentimental or kitsch, but instead seem tender, sensitive and respectful evocations of the native people and places of Java and Bali. They are very academic works, ambitious and highly competent for an artist who was only in his early twenties when he painted them.

The second album contains further photographs of Schoon's studio (many are inscribed "*mijn atelier Bandoeng*") dated 1937, posed photographs of native models (probably Balinese, and closely resembling the more anthropological photographs taken by Walter Spies), and landscape views of Java and Bali (perhaps related to Schoon's work for KPM). There are a number of

¹⁵ Adrian Vickers (Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, Australia), email to author, 16 Oct 2002.

photographs of a group of native children swimming, and a charming group of photographs of a little Dutch girl named Hettie.

The casual, candid tenor of these images suggests that they relate to the private rather than the more flamboyant public Schoon personality. Perhaps they must be viewed as a personal record of the young artist striking out in the world in his own studio.¹⁶ Clearly they also show his fondness for the people and places around him. The photographs of children, and similarly his interest in the marginalised, already suggest a desire to exist in an innocent context and be accepted by people not conditioned to the prejudicial mind-sets of the “real” world.

Unlike many later photographic portraits taken of Schoon in New Zealand, none of these images from Bandung adopts for him a Javanese or Balinese persona. Instead we find a young man dressed rather unexceptionally, though immaculately, in the contemporary Western fashion in a highly exotic setting. These images seem to suggest that Schoon’s later posing and posturing were either a somewhat narcissistic ploy for attention and uniqueness in an otherwise bland and parochial mid-twentieth century New Zealand, or, perhaps, part of an ongoing development of his “self” as an artwork.¹⁷ In the self-portraits in these albums, Schoon seems to emphasise his European-ness—the mark of his European education—while simultaneously being aware of and enthralled by indigenous Indies cultures, as evidenced by the careful and intimate studies of the Balinese and Javanese.

On one page in the second album is a curious juxtaposition noted by Skinner.¹⁸ It is a central head-shot portrait of Schoon looking to his left, chin resting on his hands. Above and below this photograph, arranged diagonally, are two smaller images of an elderly Javanese or Balinese man and woman. Skinner posits that this represents a kind of “fictional family tree ... evidence of his bicultural identity,” but this seems unlikely.¹⁹ Schoon was far too intelligent for

¹⁶ Skinner, 1999a, p. 69.

¹⁷ Skinner, 1999a, pp. 69 ff.

¹⁸ Skinner, 1999a, p. 70.

¹⁹ Skinner, 1999a, p. 70.

that kind of game play, despite the way he often surrounded himself in fantasy; rather he was probably attracted by the contrast of opposites: young/old and Asian/European.

This was the time of the second flowering of the great ethnographical adventure in South-East Asia and the western Pacific, following on from the work of the Swiss photographer Felix Speiser earlier in the century. The Australian Frank Hurley was photographing the native tribes of Papua (New Guinea) between 1920 and 1923, with a deliberate slant toward exoticism intended to appeal to a Western audience.²⁰ In Bali, Spies' mandate of practice, on the other hand, is given as "to place the images [of villages, rice paddies, temples, dancers] of the performing arts within their social and cultural context."²¹ A respected artist and Bali expert like Spies would have been an influence on Schoon, perhaps explaining his consistent interest in photography as an artistic medium despite overwhelming negative criticism and incomprehension on the part of New Zealand art critics for the first half of the twentieth century.²²

Our understanding of the modernist era, has, in our own time, been revised and reinterpreted within the contexts of marginal strategies rather than traditional, stylistically exclusive centrist art histories. Much of this new discourse was inspired by select events: the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978; MoMA's 'Primitivism' and *Twentieth Century Art* exhibition in New York in 1984; the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 1989; and the foundation of periodicals like the London-based magazine *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture*, all of which have questioned the traditional distinctions between "West" and "Other" as part of a movement toward cultural de-colonisation and decentralisation. It is the displacement of modernist and classical discourse by

²⁰ J. Specht and J. Fields, *Frank Hurley in Papua: Photographs of the 1920–1923 Exhibitions*. Bathurst: Robert Brown Assoc. & Australian Museum Trust, 1984.

²¹ M. Hitchcock and L. Norris, *Bali the Imaginary Museum: The Photographs of Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete*. Oxford: Hitchcock & Norris, 1995, p. 10.

²² Skinner, 1999a, p. 69.

post-colonialism and the pluralist context that has made it possible to look at new ways of interpreting Schoon and artists like him.

Where the Sea Meets the Sky: Modern Art in the Dutch East Indies

The Princedoms of Bali came relatively late to Dutch control in 1906. In 1917, two years after Schoon's birth, Europe was re-introduced to Bali through paintings, by colonials, of local life exhibited in the galleries of the Amsterdam artists' society *Arti et Amicitiae*. From 1920 onward, the Dutch were active in a "Balinisation" (*Balisering*) of Bali, re-empowering the traditional Hindu high castes and reviving Balinese dance, gamelan music and arts to safeguard "authentic" Balinese culture. It was then re-moulded to fit erotic, romantic and anthropological imagination of the West, through the efforts of Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Jane Belo, Colin McPhee and Walter Spies.²³ Europe's interest in exoticism was at its acme in the inter-bellum period, as exemplified by the extraordinary popularity of jazz, Josephine Baker and Art Deco in the northern hemisphere. Bali naturally became a popular destination for the well-heeled and sophisticated tourist. Visitors to Bali during Schoon's second residency in the Dutch Indies included the musicians Colin Macphee, Jaap Kunst and Leopold Stokowsky, film makers Victor von Plessen and André Roosevelt, and actors Charlie Chaplin and Noel Coward.²⁴ Bali had established itself as a focus of Western cultural interest.

Paul Gauguin, it is said, dreamed of establishing a studio in the tropics with other French artists, where he believed the art of the future would be born.²⁵ He never realised his dream, but something similar was brought about by predominantly Dutch artists in pre-Second World War Bali. Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978) settled in Ubud in 1931, and the Mexican painter Miguel Covarrubias resided in Bali from 1930 to 1933. Bonnet trained at the Academie in The Hague.²⁶ Spies, Bonnet and the archaeologist Willem Frederik

²³ Gouda, p. 34.

²⁴ W. Pijbes, "The Artists of the Tropics: the Artists of the Future." Online. Oxford Available <http://www.ias.nl/iasn/23/asianart/23ART1.html>

²⁵ Pijbes, loc.cit.

²⁶ Benezit, p. 541.

Stutterheim, fearing the negative effects of the tourist trade on Balinese painting, founded the *Pita Maha* artists association in 1936.²⁷ All belonged to the local community of expatriate artists, characterised by a Byzantine prevalence of quaintly-mannered aestheticism, ennui, spleen, impuissance and ubiquitous homosexuality. Bonnet was the practical organiser of the *Pita Maha* group; he was eventually forced out of Bali in 1957 when he refused to sell President Sukarno a painting.²⁸

The distinguishing characteristics of the resulting Balinese “modernism”, among the indigenous practitioners in particular, were decorative, completely filled surfaces, an almost complete absence of perspective and a sophisticated naïveté comparable to that seen in the Flemish medieval tradition and the lush magical realism of Rousseau (“Le Douanier”). The first major exhibition of *Pita Maha* work was held in *L’Art Décoratif dans les Indes Néerlandaises*, in 1927 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Louvre, Paris). In 1928 parts of colonial artist W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp’s private collection of Indies genre scenes were shown in museums in The Hague, Munich and Paris. In 1937 the Pulchri studio in The Hague and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam showed work by Walter Spies’ and Rudolf Bonnet’s *Pita Maha* artists.²⁹

In 1936, Spies was working for KPM designing a hotel in the Balinese style on Lake Bratan, Bali. As Schoon was working for KPM at this time, it seems likely that they met through the shipping company.³⁰

Covarrubias is notable for applying Picasso and Braque’s newly invented language of analytical Cubism to caricature. He was close friends with Diego Riviera and Frida Kahlo, and like them was strongly influenced by pre-Columbian and folk art. His work relied on reinterpreting well-known faces into a system of interlocking planes in a manner curiously self-conscious of Picasso’s Cubist portraits. An excellent example of this is his *Clark Gable vs.*

²⁷ *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, Vol 15, p. 809.

²⁸ “Bali Arts and Crafts—Foreign Artists in Bali.” <http://baliwww.com/bali/arts/bonnet.htm>

²⁹ Pijbes, loc.cit.

³⁰ Gouda, p. 60, n. 90.

Edward, Prince of Wales (1932).³¹ Covarrubas has been described by Vardenoe and Gopnik as “the Gershwin to Picasso’s Stravinsky.” He enjoyed a fruitful career as a caricaturist in New York, particularly for *Vanity Fair*, which he eventually gave up to return to Mexico City, where he spent the rest of his life as the curator of the National Museum’s Department of Primitive Art.³² It is conceivable that he may have been an influence on Schoon’s early work as a caricaturist. His Bali paintings are relatively conventional (fig. 17).

Possibly, contact with these artists may have helped Schoon develop the mindset he would later adopt in his sympathetic relationship with Māori. Walter Spies, holding a very high profile in Bali at the time, was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of a Hindu-Bali school for high caste Balinese girls, even offering to design the building.³³ Painter Rudolf Bonnet articulated the *Pita Maha* position by describing the Netherlands’ attitude *vis-à-vis* the Balinese as that of a sophisticated adult to an “untrained but artistically gifted child of alien origins.”³⁴

The “Beautiful Indies” Style

Many Europeans, the Dutch colonists in particular, became enraptured by the dignified refinement of Javanese aristocratic society and the artistry of the “authentic” feudal, caste-based society of Bali—perhaps recalling for the educated Dutch middle-classes their own rich medieval and renaissance European history.³⁵ Bali in particular was reinvented as a replacement for Gauguin’s erstwhile Tahiti, uncontaminated by modernity, for what the American anthropologist Raymond Kennedy called “prostitute-hunting tourists in the last Paradise.”³⁶ Naturally enough, and particularly because of the

³¹ Tempera on paper, 35.6 x 27.9 cm. Iconography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, The University of Texas at Austin.

³² K. Varnedoe and A. Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991, p. 136.

³³ Gouda, p. 46.

³⁴ R. Bonnet, *Aanmerkingen op het afwijzend oordeel [van een Europees hoofd eener H. I. S.] over de oprichting eener Bali-Hindoeschool*. [Pamphlet] September 1953, No. 10.

³⁵ Gouda, p. 26.

³⁶ R. Kennedy, *The Ageless Indies*. New York: John Day, 1943, p. 147.

constant flow of people back and forth between Europe and the Indies, the Dutch living in Java and Bali wanted souvenirs of the colony, stressing their romantic and exotic impressions. This naturally attracted artists throughout the three centuries of Dutch colonial rule. Haks' and Maris' *Lexicon of Foreign Artists who Visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)*—the authoritative text on the subject—lists just under three thousand artists, including Schoon.

The Javanese painter S. Sudjono cynically coined the phrase *Mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies) in the early twentieth century, as a criticism of the style and themes of the paintings being produced during the then-Dutch-colonial period:

The paintings we see nowadays are mostly landscapes: rice fields being ploughed, rice fields inundated by clear and calm water, or a hut in the middle of a ripening field with the inevitable coconut palms or bamboo stools nearby, or bamboo groves with blue-shimmering mountains in the background. Similarly there are paintings of women who must have red shawls fluttering in the wind, or, shaded by an umbrella, wear a blue jacket—everyday *lebaran* [the celebrations following Ramadan] poetry.³⁷

Mooi Indië provides us with a name for the style in which the young Schoon expressed himself artistically after his Rotterdam training. This somewhat stifling atmosphere contributed extensively to preventing much of a local vernacular developing in the contemporary art of the time. There was one significant and compelling reason for the mass-production of these soothingly picturesque landscapes and scenes of local life. The lifeblood of the Dutch Indies aside from sugarcane, coffee and tea, was tourism:

Everything is very beautiful and romantic, paradisaical [sic], everything is very pleasing, calm, and peaceful. Such paintings carry only one meaning: the beautiful Indies . . . for . . . foreigners and tourists...The mountain, the coconut palm, and the rice field are the holy trinity in the scenes of these painters . . . and like the painter, so the public, . . . And should a painter try to paint something different than this trinity . . . art dealer will tell him, "*Dat is niet voor ons, meneer.*" ("This is not for us, sir.") What he really means is, "This is not for the tourists or the pensioned Hollander, sir." And such a painter, if he does not want to become tubercular, might better become a teacher or look for a job as a statistical clerk... This is not a healthy situation, respected reader. What are its causes? First, the majority of painters here are Europeans, foreigners, who remain here two or three years. Second our local painters only want to serve the tourists...³⁸

³⁷ S. Sudjojono, "Seni Loekis di Indonesia sekarang dan jang akan datang." Cited by C. Holt (Trans.), *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 195–196, from *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*. Jakarta, 1946, pp. 1–9.

³⁸ see f.n. 38

Two distinct groups emerged among those artists working in the naturalistic *Mooi Indië* style in the manner of the realism of the West. The first of these were the Europeans who had become permanent residents of the Indies. Of these, most had been trained in the fine arts in their countries of birth. As a Dutch colony it was natural that the Dutch schools predominated. The second group of artists working in this mode consisted of the relatively few Javanese and Balinese artists emerging around the 1930s who, despite their obvious talent, tended to be viewed by the expatriates as of inferior status.³⁹

Indigenous developing artists, impatient champions of a school of unique national modernism, were the harshest critics of *Mooi Indië*, Sudjojono in particular. “The compositions are indistinguishable from those of Adolfs, Locatelli, Jan Frank, Sayers and of other European painters who live here.”⁴⁰ Other artists who should be added are Frits Ohl (1904–1976), Saiman Dullah (1919–1996), Leonardus Joseph Eland (1884–1952), and Johannes Frederik Engelbert ten Klooster (1873–1940).⁴¹ The works of Roland Strasser, active in the late 1920s and early 1930s, was an Austrian painter who, along with his close friend Dooijewaard, produced works extraordinarily similar to those of Schoon.⁴²

A work by Schoon of around this period (circa 1937) (Fig. 15),⁴³ reflecting something of this style, depicts an Indonesian dancer against a swirling abstract background in ink and wash on paper. It is a beautiful work lush with colour and greatly resembling the fauvist Romanesque and Byzantine inspired expressionism of Georges Rouault (1871–1958). Like Rouault’s works, the painting uses dark lines to compartmentalise a Romantic figure into simplified areas of colour. The work is, however, not exceptional in terms of theme or intent. Soft brushwork and an insistence on essential form suggest a superficial

³⁹ “Indonesian Heritage.” Online. Available

http://www.indonesianheritage.com/Encyclopedia/Visual_Art/T.../body_mooi_indie.htm

⁴⁰ S. Sudjojono, “Menoedjoe Tjorak Seni Loekis Persatoean Indonesia Baroe.” Cited by Holt, p. 197, from *Seni Loekis*, pp. 12–13.

⁴¹ A work by Schoon was presented for sale for between 400–500 euros along with works by these four artists at the *Venduehuis der Notarissen* in The Hague, Netherlands in 2002.

Online. Available http://www.venduehuis.com/hkav_04_02/0001_0185.html

⁴² Online. Available <http://www.baliwww.com/bali/arts/roland.htm>

modernism. Similar fawn-eyed, highly stylised, decorative young natives can be found throughout the Bali paintings of Auke Sonnega (1910–1963) (fig. 16). Sonnega was born in the north of Holland to Frisian parents who became Theosophists between 1915 and 1920. Sonnega moved to Bali in 1935.⁴⁴ An exhibition of Sonnega's work was held at the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden (Netherlands) from 10 September to 26 November 2000.⁴⁵ Schoon's natives seem to be most greatly influenced by Bonnet. Robert Taylor described Schoon's work of the early 1940s as "strictly commercial ... saccharine portrayals of Javanese or Balinese dancing girls."⁴⁶ Dennis Knight Turner's *Island Girl* (Oil, last known whereabouts: Helen Hitchings Gallery 1951) is very much a variation on Schoon's doe-eyed dusky maid.

A surviving Schoon work of this early period is a minor piece entitled *Indonesian Landscape*.⁴⁷ The technique of this work shows an awareness of expressionism and impressionism. Its use of bright contrasting colours and Spies-influenced abstracting compositional geometries, closely resembles the village scenes by modern Javanese painters in the Western mode, particularly the untutored Soejono (Soedjojono, 1914–1986), Schoon's contemporary, famed as a rebel painter of "small cottages by the side of lakes, sea shores with bamboo trees and distant mountains in the background."⁴⁸

Western Artists in Central Java

One artist in Java of whom Schoon probably was aware, was Piet Ouborg (1893–1956). Ouborg, living in Bandung at the same time as Schoon, offers an interesting parallel. Ouborg arrived in the East Indies from the Netherlands in

⁴³ The original is lost, but Peter Sauerbier retains in his collection a photograph of the work, taken by him and presented the author with a laser copy, March 2001.

⁴⁴ Online. Available <http://www.baliwww.com/bali/arts/auke.htm>

⁴⁵ A. Sonnega [H. Rof (Trans.)], "A Facet of the Cosmic Pattern." Online. Available <http://www.xs4all.nl/~wichm/sonnega.html>

⁴⁶ R Taylor. "Tiki: The Return of Dennis Knight Turner." *Art New Zealand* 67, Winter, 1993, p. 46.

⁴⁷ Oil, 77 x70 mm. Signed, undated. Lot 22. *International Art Centre Catalogue*, 26 April 1995, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Z. Hug, "Soejono, Indonesian Landscape Painter." *Artasia* Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1967, p. 46.

1916, the year after Schoon's birth, assigned at twenty-three years of age to be an elementary school teacher at Serang in West Java.⁴⁹

An art teacher, he was most properly a Surrealist in his fascination with Ernst, Tanguy, Dali and Magritte. He returned to the Netherlands in 1938 while Schoon was also there.

Ouborg's many years of contact with oriental culture matured into a highly spontaneous free expressionism that was almost entirely abstract in a way predating, but comparable to Henri Michaux.⁵⁰ Perhaps Schoon could have been aware of Ouborg within the context of the localised colonial community of the Dutch East Indies.⁵¹ Schoon employed similar calligraphic/Surrealist automatic techniques to Ouborg in the mid 1960s.⁵²

Ouborg was a self-taught artist who, up until 1930, painted mostly East Indian models and landscapes. During his "blue period" (1930–40) he obsessively painted his collection of East Indian masks and wajang puppets. In his second Surrealist period (1940–45) these figures were placed within fictive and theatrical spaces.

Rob Nieuwenhuys offers a poignant picture of the Dutch colonial artistic community of this period, in his book *Oost Indische Spiegel* (1972):

In the East Indies, the making of art was always mingled or confused with amusement and leisure. It was carried out like a party game, as a means to provide everyday life with some variety. People could picnic together, go to a ball together, play homber, organize a flower procession, but also perform music together, act in plays or sing. It was all seen as being socially the same thing ...

At activities largely depended on the head of the local board, or perhaps more likely, his wife, or that of another dignitary. Should she have artistic and organisational abilities, art and theatre blossomed. Frequently, though, this was not the case and social events were limited to receptions, and evenings of dancing and cards. One wouldn't have expected much in the way of "higher

⁴⁹ L. Ten Duis and A. Haase, *Ouborg: Schilder/Painter*. The Hague: SDU Uitgeverij & Openbaar kunstbezit, 1990, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Pound, 1999, p. 47.

⁵¹ For an in-depth examination of that social setting, see E. J. M. Schmutzer, *Dutch Colonial Policy and the Search for Identity in Indonesia 1920–1931*. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

⁵² D. Skinner, *Hattaway, Schoon, Walters: Madness and modernism*. Auckland: Lopdell House Gallery, 1997, p. 22.

pleasures". After a hard day's labour, heat and troubles, all anyone wanted was distraction.⁵³

In that milieu, painting was understood to be painting pretty pictures of Indonesian sawahs (rice paddies), "the dikes green and the required palm tree present".⁵⁴ In a letter from Malang to his brother Jan, on 13 February 1925, Ouborg wrote:

The Europeans in the East Indies are all suffering from a tropical disease ... far more terrible than the gruelling heat: the emptiness, the absence of idealism and thinking, of dreaming away silently to oneself.⁵⁵

In the late 1920s, Ouborg worked in Jakarta as a drawing teacher and was frequently involved in the activities of the Batavian Art Association. This and a variety of flourishing art groups on Java were eventually consolidated into the *Bond van Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen* (Union of Dutch-East Indian Art Associations) for which Ouborg was an advisor.⁵⁶ The Union organised exhibitions of French, Italian and Russian contemporary painting in Java in the 1950s.⁵⁷

It was at this time that Ouborg recognised the talent of the native artist Soejono, who is now regarded as the founder of modern Indonesian painting.⁵⁸ Ouborg became the centre of an arts community of those colonial artists most interested in the avant-gardisms of modernist Europe: Jan Frank, Adolf Breetveld, Johannes Tielrooy, and other left-wing intellectuals and artists primarily within the educational sector, sympathetic to the indigenous cause.⁵⁹

By the time of Ouborg's second Indonesian period (around 1925), the influence of Analytical Cubism and Expressionism are strong in his work, as was a certain lushness of line and Javanese masks also become very important in his paintings. He made a special visit to the Ethnographic Museum in Batavia

⁵³ R. Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel*, Amsterdam, 1972, p. 287.

⁵⁴ J. Tielrooy, "Indie in de schilder—en teekenkunst." *Elsevier's Geillustreerd Maandschrift* 7, July 1930, pp. 2–10.

⁵⁵ Ten Duis and Haase, p. 11

⁵⁶ Ten Duis and Haase, p. 16.

⁵⁷ *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, Vol. 15, p. 808.

⁵⁸ Ten Duis and Haase, p.17. For more information on Soedjojono see J. Supangkat, "A Brief History of Modern Art." In C. Turner (Ed.), *Tradition and Change: contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993, p. 46 .

⁵⁹ Ten Duis and Haase, p. 17.

where he became interested in ethnic art, and just as Schoon would later tour New Zealand looking for rock drawings, Ouborg scoured Malang and Cirebon for ceremonial masks to add to his collection. Like Schoon, Ouborg was a devotee of Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*, which gives much attention to the magical and transformative properties of masks.⁶⁰

In 1930, Ouborg returned to the Netherlands on leave. At this time he saw the exhibition *L'Art Vivant* in Brussels—the work of the School of Paris, Miro, Ernst, de Chirico, Masson, Arp, Dali, Leger, Klee and Picasso, all of whom he would imitate at various points in his career. It is possible that Schoon visited this exhibition as well as he was travelling in Europe then and Paris is an obvious magnet for any artist.⁶¹ There he would have encountered work by the *Cercle et Carré* (Circle and Square), a group founded in 1930 and including Joaquín Torres-García, Jean Arp, and Schoon's idols Kandinsky and Mondrian, as well as other constructivist-minded artists. He may also have seen work by Jean Hélion and Alfred Manessier, all possible influences on Schoon's work. Schoon also travelled in Switzerland at this time.⁶² Klee was in Switzerland in 1931, having fled Nazi Germany, as was Alberto Giacometti. The Dada movement was also particularly strong.⁶³

Schoon and Ouborg may possibly have become acquainted in Bandung around 1936. Given Ouborg's profile, Schoon would certainly have been aware of him. At this period Ouborg was mainly producing paintings of "Assemblages", strange Surrealist accumulations of clay pots and shards, stones, eggs, limbs and indescribable objects that seem to echo Bosch and Breugel. There is a certain Freudian symbolism often invoked and the works show the direct influence of Dali, Tanguy, Arp and de Chirico. An obvious genealogical resemblance exists between these paintings and Schoon's photographs of accumulated stones and geothermal structures. The same kind of Freudian phallic symbolism that influenced Ouborg and other Symbolists, also seems to

⁶⁰ Ten Duis and Haase, pp. 21–24.

⁶¹ Rumsey, 1995a.

⁶² Rumsey, 1995a.

⁶³ C. Tschumi (Archivist, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zürich), email to author, 14 Jan 2003.

inform Schoon's gourds, and particularly the photograph *Untitled (Stones)* (Fig. 7) taken in Sumner, Christchurch circa 1950.

Surrealism, with its rejection of rational representation of other cultures to suit itself, can only be seen as an emancipatory project reflecting the "everyday" of the rational "real"—and therefore able to embrace the ulterior somewhere between Romantic conservatism and progressive Expressionism.⁶⁴ It would seem it was Schoon who led Walters into the Surrealist phase that produced a series of conté drawings of Tanguy-like landscapes with deep space planes and mysterious shadows using local geographic features.⁶⁵

In some Ouborg paintings from the late 1940s–early 1950s, *At the Grave* (1950) and *The Sign* (1947), we can observe some striking similarities with the drawings and paintings Schoon produced in the 1960s. These stylistic affinities infer a possible didactic relationship. The most obvious similarities are with the Hattaway-inspired works like *Done up in pins and curlers* (1965) (Fig. 8)⁶⁶ where we recognise the use of sketchy areas of colour contrasted with defined elements. These are constructivist/geometric in the case of Ouborg rather than the constructivist/linear of Schoon.

Another artist active in Bandung at the time was Adolf Breetvelt (or Breetveld). Breetvelt was born in Vrijenban, the Netherlands, in 1892. He was trained in art at The Hague and in 1920 came to the Indies where he was appointed drawing teacher at a secondary school in Jakarta. Breetvelt participated in several exhibitions in Java organised by the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* between 1924 and 1938. He eventually returned to the Netherlands, dying in Amsterdam in 1975. Like Ouborg, Breetvelt's delicately figurative paintings became increasingly surrealistic, resulting in abstraction by circa 1947. The majority of his Java paintings were destroyed in Bandung during the Second World War.⁶⁷ Other graphic and fine artists of note, active in Bandung at that time and probably known to Schoon, include Abdullah Suryosubroto

⁶⁴ A. Giddens, "Modernism and Post-modernism." *New German Critique* 22, 1981, p. 16.

⁶⁵ M. Dunn. "The Enigma of Gordon Walters' Art." *Art New Zealand* 9, 1978, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Oil on paper, 61 x 48 cm. Paris Family Collection, Wellington.

⁶⁷ Haks and Maris, p. 46.

(1878–1941),⁶⁸ Willem Hofker (1902–1981),⁶⁹ Romualdo Locatelli (1905–1943),⁷⁰ Charles Thomas Nix (1904–?),⁷¹ Charles Prosper Wolff Schoemaker (1882–?),⁷² and Rudolf Wenghart (1887–?).⁷³

In January 1942, Japanese troops landed in Borneo and the Celebes. In February they invaded Sumatra. The indigenes often welcomed the Japanese as fellow Asians and liberators from Dutch oppression. By mid-March Jakarta had fallen and many Dutch soldiers, planters, civilian officials and their families boarded transports for safer harbours.

In New York that year, Peggy Guggenheim opened her “Art of This Century” gallery, the first issue of the Surrealist magazine *VVV* was published, and Breton and Duchamp organised the “First Papers of Surrealism” exhibition. Modernist art was making great strides toward becoming the dominant mode..

In 1999, a number of Schoon works came up for auction in Australia. These included two oil paintings (*Ram and Figure* and *Balinese Figure*) and several photographs—a self-portrait in Balinese costume, nineteen prints of various Indonesian subjects, and three untitled gelatin silver photographic prints of Javanese or Balinese children. One of these is enigmatically inscribed in Dutch on the back in pencil, “Who’s Coming here?” and “Nazi army—the war is driving eastwards,” signed “Garod”.⁷⁴ Garod is unidentified, but clearly this is the frightened voice of someone who can see the conflict of the Second World War moving in his direction.

⁶⁸ Online. Available

http://www.indonesianheritage.com/Encyclopedia/Visual_Art/T.../body_mooi_indie.htm

⁶⁹ Haks and Maris, p. 124.

⁷⁰ Haks and Maris, p. 172.

⁷¹ Haks and Maris, p. 196.

⁷² Haks and Maris, p. 298.

⁷³ Haks and Maris, p. 290.

⁷⁴ *Australian Art Sales Digest 1999*.

CHAPTER 5

THE FIRST DECADE IN NEW ZEALAND: 1939–1949

Landfall in Unknown Seas

In September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. In mid-1939, anticipating the coming turmoil, the Schoon family fled the Indies and sought refuge in New Zealand. According to M. Vance:

J. T. Schoon, an educational administrator, had retired to New Zealand after 26 years in the Dutch East Indies. With him were his wife and two sons, one of whom, Theo, planned to study art at Canterbury College ...

The Schoons made the right choice in coming to New Zealand, rather than staying in Java or returning to The Netherlands ... By February 1939, war seemed inevitable.¹

By 1940 the Japanese had joined Germany, and the Axis completed their incursion into the Dutch East Indies as Japan expanded its Pacific Co-Prosperity Sphere. In terms of the history of the area, this was nothing new—Indies history is one of semi-permanent occupation at the hands of any number of different invaders. The Japanese occupied the archipelago, like their Portuguese and Dutch predecessors, to secure its rich natural resources. Fuel had to be imported from foreign sources to feed Japan's colossal war machine. Until 1940, the Indonesian archipelago supplied a critical twenty-five percent of Japan's oil.²

From Tokyo's perspective, the increasingly critical attitude of the United States, Britain, and the Dutch toward Japan's invasion of China in March 1932 reflected the desire of the West to stifle Japan's "legitimate" (from their

¹ M. Vance, "Big Bird Unearthed." Christchurch: *The Press*. 19 Feb 2000, p. 11.

² "Indonesia History, The Japanese Occupation." Online. Available http://www.workmall.com/wfb2001/indonesia/indonesia_history_the_japanese_occupation_1942_45.html

perspective) imperialist aspirations in Asia. Occupation of the Netherlands in May 1940 by German forces led directly to Japan's demand that the Netherlands Indies supply it with fixed quantities of oil. A non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in April 1941 freed Japan to wage war against the United States and the European colonial powers.³

The Netherlands was suffering a similar fate at the hands of the Third Reich. The Nazis saw the Dutch as a fellow "Aryan" race to be assimilated. On 14 May 1940, after the Netherlands had already surrendered, the port of Rotterdam was bombed by the German Luftwaffe and almost entirely levelled.

The Schoon family lived in Waipapa Road, Christchurch. Brothers Theo and Pieter Schoon settled, but their parents, unhappy, returned to the Indies soon after and were captured by the Japanese in 1940. Mr and Mrs Schoon remained in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Java for the duration of the war. They were reunited with their sons in Dunedin where Johannes Schoon was employed in the repatriation of Dutch Prisoners of War. Mr and Mrs Schoon then returned to the Netherlands, to live in Amsterdam, as Rotterdam was still rebuilding after the bombing of the port.⁴ Johannes Schoon died in Rotterdam in 1953, while Barbara Schoon (registered on her death certificate under her maiden name Steegemans) lived on in Amsterdam until 1975.⁵

Theo Schoon had undergone a radical transition from the Indo-Dutch colonial culture to the largely monolithic, homogenous and decidedly British culture of New Zealand. The country had been a Dominion since 1907, and the culture of dependency on London in matters cultural and administrative was slowly giving way to the First Labour Government's nationalist agenda. In terms of personality, culture and habit of thought, any resemblance between the Anglo-New Zealander Pākehā and the Dutch refugee was entirely cosmetic.

Schoon probably tried to adapt to the alien world he found himself in. After the urbane sophistication of the Netherlands and the exotic Indies, New Zealand

³ "Indonesia History, The Japanese Occupation." loc.cit.

⁴ S. Schoon, 2003.

must have seemed entirely backward and artistically sterile, an impression that would have been reinforced by the curtailment of artistic activity in wartime. His European temperament would be a hindrance to him, as would his inability to accurately interpret New Zealand behaviour, mannerisms and expressions. Like all immigrant artists coming to Australasia, he would have to “re-educate” his considerable artistic literacy to an English-speaking, Anglo-Celtic, antipodean context.⁶

Christchurch in the 1930s and 1940s

New Zealand at the time was something of a cultural backwater, puritanical, and conservative in many respects—a buffer state between the British Empire and Asia-Pacific. Schoon remained convinced throughout his life that New Zealand art suffered from ignorance of anything important, and wrote in 1966:

The provincial mind is difficult to demolish, difficult to live with. It has a special instinct for anything of no consequence. It really means you have to be ruthless in weeding out, and quick in accepting new insights as something to live by.⁷

Christchurch in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, was the country’s liveliest cultural centre.⁸ The Caxton Press founded in 1936, the independent artists known as The Group founded in 1927, Ngaio Marsh’s Little Theatre at Canterbury (University) College, and Rita Angus, Doris Lusk, Evelyn Page, William A. Sutton,⁹ Leo Bensemann, Denis Glover, Allen Curnow, Douglas Lilburn, Bob Gormack and Bill Pearson could all be found there.

⁵ M. van Vuur (Unit Registers en Archieven, Dienst Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, Amsterdam), email to author, 27 June 2003.

⁶ J. Zimmer, “Understanding/Misunderstanding: By Reference to Wittgenstein’s *Zettel*.” *Artlink*. Vol 11, Nos.1 and 2 [double issue], 1991, p. 20.

⁷ T. Schoon, letter to M. Dunn, October 1966.

⁸ J. Mané-Wheoki, “The High Arts in a Regional Culture—From Englishness to Self-Reliance.” In J. Cookson and G. Dunstall (Eds.), *Southern Capital: Christchurch—Towards a City Biography 1850–2000*. Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, pp. 299–324.

⁹ According to Kelvin Anderson (a former pounamu-carving student of Schoon’s) relations between Schoon and Sutton were hostile and often volatile, largely because Schoon was the epitome of the European artist, openly disdaining British artistic sensibilities. Sutton was equally hostile toward Rudolf Gopas for similar reasons. (Kelvin Anderson, conversation with author, March 2001)

By 1940, the New Zealand Government had followed Britain into war with Germany. The New Zealand in which Schoon found himself at the start of the Second World War was still relatively nascent as a nation and very much part of the British Empire. Māori lived primarily in rural poverty in a kind of unspoken apartheid. Immigrants of non-British origin were treated with suspicion and prejudice, and someone of Schoon's eccentric flamboyance would certainly have been frowned upon by middle New Zealand; he would have found himself an outcast and pariah in all but the most bohemian circles. As Dutch-New Zealand writer Rob Wentholt observed, regarding his own status, "Once an exile always an exile, or from the New Zealand situation which does not readily admit outsiders into its inner sanctum of acceptance."¹⁰ Also at the time of Schoon's arrival, fears of an Axis "fifth column" infiltrating New Zealand was resulting in the harassment of foreigners, particularly Northern Europeans. The war created a high-pressure environment:

In the second year of the second Pākehā century the settlers faced their grimmest threat, that of a Japanese victory in the Pacific, and were taught that the British, in whom they had trusted for the first century, [could be depended on] no longer.¹¹

It was characteristic of Schoon to seek out the avant-garde wherever he was. Soon after his arrival in Christchurch, he made his first contact with New Zealand artists Rita Angus (introducing her to Buddhist art and culture¹²) and Louise Henderson. Angus lived at 97A Cambridge Terrace. Next door lived the graphic artist Leo Bensemann, and Lawrence Baigent who worked at the Caxton Press. The three of them formed the core of New Zealand's answer to the Bloomsbury group and a meeting point for cultural people of all persuasions. According to their friend Robert Erwin, Schoon visited the Cambridge Terrace studios.¹³

¹⁰ R. Wentholt, "A Choice of Worlds." *Landfall*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1962, p. 343.

¹¹ W. H. Oliver, "The Awakening Imagination 1940-1980" in G. W. Rice (Ed.) *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, second edition. Oxford and Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 539.

¹² M. Dunn, "The Art of Theo Schoon", *Art New Zealand* 25. 1982, p. 22.

¹³ R. Erwin, stated at lecture given by Peter Simpson 20 Feb 2003, *Rita Angus & Leo Bensemann: The Cambridge Terrace Years*, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, 21 Feb-27 April 2003.

Schoon attended the Canterbury College School of Fine Arts, then under Richard Wallwork as Head of Department.¹⁴ The Art School records show that one “Schoon, Theodoor [sic] (Reg. No. 39.137)” was a student “part day” in 1940.¹⁵ He made an impact there with his satirical cartoons.¹⁶ It seems incredible that Schoon would have enrolled at the Canterbury school at all, having already received an exemplary training in Rotterdam. Was he, perhaps, trying to familiarise himself with New Zealand art practice? It is unlikely that he would have considered teachers like Wallwork, Francis Shurrock, Rata Lovell Smith, Ivy Forrester or Florence Akins to be the equal of those of the Rotterdam Academy.¹⁷ What could they possibly have taught him that he would not have learned back in the Netherlands? These may be unfair comments—Wallwork was a highly skilled British-trained painter,¹⁸ and likewise British-trained sculptor Francis Shurrock had been praised as a student in 1913 by no less an artist than Auguste Rodin¹⁹; additionally, his strong dislike of the division of art and craft may have made him sympathetic to Schoon’s Bauhaus-influenced views.²⁰

Already active in the Christchurch art scene were Archibald Nicoll, Sydney Thompson and Olivia Spencer-Bower. Inevitably, given his temperament, Schoon would have been unlikely to have seen any of these as his equals.

His close relationship with Angus seems, at first, unusual, as her feminism would not have sat well with his misogyny. As Michael Dunn has noted, this was also the case with the potter Helen Mason, with whom Schoon “stayed for some time and whose generosity and good nature he made use of for his own advantage.”²¹

¹⁴ N. Roberts (Ed.), *A Concise History of Art in Canterbury 1850-2000*. Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 2000[a], p. 62.

¹⁵ Archives, University of Canterbury, School of Fine Arts, Christchurch.

¹⁶ “Maori rock drawings by Schoon.” Christchurch: *The Press*, 14 Aug 1985.

¹⁷ W. J. Gardner, E. T. Beardsley, and T. E. Carter, *A History of the University of Canterbury 1873-1973*. Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 1973, p. 467.

¹⁸ N. Roberts, *Richard & Elizabeth Wallwork*. Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 2000[b]

¹⁹ Decorative Arts catalogue, C1975.98, Accession Number 1975.284.58, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, from information given by the artist.

²⁰ Roberts, 2000b, p. 51.

²¹ Dunn, 2003, p. 83.

His respect for Angus' talent was such, however, that he introduced her to his patron Dr John Money, who went on to collect her work over the years.²²

The painting taught by the school at this time was the kind of romantic, tonal pseudo-impressionism popular in Britain. In Canterbury this had been influenced since the 1890s by the work of James Nairn, a Barbizon influenced painter from Scotland,²³ and Van der Velden—by far the superior artist. The bravura and freeness of brushwork this fostered would have been quite different to the meticulously detailed painting techniques Schoon had learned in Rotterdam, and decades behind what he had been reading about and seeing in Europe. Wallwork worked in a more-or-less Victorian mode, and Shurrock's style was Rodinesque from his training at London's Royal College, with Edouard Lateri (1848-1817).

In 1940 there were two important exhibitions that Schoon probably visited. The first was the Canterbury Society of Arts' Sixtieth Jubilee Exhibition held in March. There he would have seen landscape paintings of Kaikoura by Richard and Elizabeth Wallwork and Rata Lovell-Smith, who had painted there in the summer. The art community was showing particular interest in Lovell-Smith as she had recently won the Bledisloe Medal for landscape.

The second notable exhibition of that year was the Canterbury College School of Art Sketch Club Exhibition held at the department store of Beath & Co in June. It was considered one of the most successful ever held and it attracted a large audience. As a visitor, Schoon would have seen work by his fellow students Owen Lee (awarded the Canterbury College School of Art gold medal for excellence in 1939), Juliet Peter, Alan Ingham, and William A. (Bill) Sutton.²⁴ It is not entirely implausible that he may have travelled to Wellington to see the Centennial Art Exhibition.

²² Dunn, 2003, p. 85.

²³ He was an associate of the group of late nineteenth–early twentieth century artists known as the Glasgow Boys, that also included Arthur Melville (1855–1904), John Quinton Pringle (1864–1925) and Edward A. Hornel (1864–1933).

²⁴ Roberts, 2000a, p. 60.

That year must have been particularly difficult for him. As 1940 advanced, the shortage of artists' materials became increasingly acute. This also coincided with growing mistrust of continental Europeans in New Zealand, something intensified in the goldfish bowl environment of war-time Christchurch. On 5 January the first echelon of Canterbury troops left Lyttelton on the *Dunera* and *Sobieski* (with Austen Deans on board as an official War Artist), and on the 25 November the *Holmwood* was sunk by German raiders en route from the Chathams to Lyttelton. Its passengers and crew were taken prisoner, eventually making their way home two months later. It appears that during the Second World War Schoon suffered harassment from the authorities for not participating in the war effort.²⁵ Anti-foreigner, and anti-European feeling in Christchurch must have been at an all-time high, perhaps enough to drive Schoon to a more cosmopolitan climate than that which A. R. D. Fairburn was to describe as "the dank pond of Chch [sic] culture—a diluted and slightly stagnant Anglicanism".²⁶ In 1941 Schoon moved to the national capital Wellington.

Wellington: A Move to the Capital

From 1941 to 1945, Schoon lived in Wellington. He met Gordon Walters at the Wellington Sketch Club and Dennis Knight Turner within the first year. Michael Dunn has described the meeting of Walters and Schoon as "the New Zealand equivalent of the Picasso-Braque relationship at the start of Cubism."²⁷ Knight Turner recalled meeting Schoon through photographer Tom Hutchins in 1941, and being transfixed in the basement studio of the YMCA as Schoon "conjured up a painted jungle around an exotic figure."²⁸ There exists a

²⁵ T. Schoon, letter to A. R. D. Fairburn, Duntroon, 2 June 1947. MSS & Archives A-125.17, University of Auckland, no page number.

²⁶ A. R. D. Fairburn, letter to Charles Brasch, 8 April 1947. Quoted in L. Edmond, *The Letters of A. R. D. Fairburn*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 158.

²⁷ M. Dunn, "Gordon Walters (1919–1995)." *Art New Zealand* 78, Autumn 1996, p. 92.

²⁸ R. Taylor, "Tiki: The Return of Dennis Knight Turner." *Art New Zealand* 67, Winter 1993, p. 59.

photograph of Schoon, Knight Turner and Walters in this cellar, taken by Schoon around 1942.²⁹

About this time, Walters read the Museum of Modern Art's Bauhaus exhibition catalogue, *Minotaur* and *Cahiers d'Art*.³⁰ This could easily be Schoon's influence. They even may have been his books.

Schoon's Rotterdam credentials and obvious skill earned him a job as a street photographer. At first he slept above his darkroom in Manners Street. Later that year he found accommodation in Mrs Bollinger's boardinghouse where he met and became friends with Martin Pharazyn. Pharazyn came from a prominent Hawkes Bay-Wellington farming family and would become a patron of Schoon and Colin McCahon. Schoon at this time still maintained a close friendship with Rita Angus.³¹

Rita Angus painted a magnificent portrait of the young Schoon in 1942–43. (Fig. 18)³² He is depicted as a nonchalant, neatly dressed, fashion-conscious young man in blue shirt, red tie, and with a slightly pompadour haircut, in his workshop in the Manners Street photographic studio. There appears to be a black and white cat on his lap. Paint brushes in the left foreground allude to his artistic identity. A vaguely surrealistic still life of biomorphic shapes, reminiscent of the work of Piet Ouborg, hangs behind him. A late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) *blanc de chine* porcelain vase in the right foreground may refer to his interest in Asian cultures.³³ It is a portrait consistent with

²⁹ The photograph was first published in L. Bell, "Putting the Record Straight." *Art New Zealand* 27, 1983, pp. 42–45. R. Lummis "Embryonic Ultra-Modernism: Walters, Schoon and Turner in the 1940s." *Art New Zealand* 95, Winter 2000, pp. 89–91.) tries to use this image to demonstrate a homosexual relationship between Schoon and Knight Turner. The photograph shows the young artists posed with two examples of the fashionably commercial, Orientalist-styled paintings of Balinese women. The one on the wall appears to be by Schoon while the one on the easel resembles some work by Knight Turner.

³⁰ M. Dunn, *Gordon Walters*, exhibition catalogue. Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983[b], p. 24–25.

³¹ Rumsey 1995a, p. 25. During the 1930s and 1940s Angus lived mainly in Christchurch, working at various short-term jobs, including teaching and as an illustrator for the *Press*. Angus's divorce had left her in a difficult position financially and socially, and it seems she sought comfort in, among other activities, visits to Schoon in Wellington.

³² The collection of Mrs Anne Marie Hertzner, USA.

³³ Schoon was also very knowledgeable about Chinese art. (Brownson, 2002.)

Angus' symbolic use of setting and props.³⁴ In answer, he painted two portraits of Angus (ca. 1942). One shows her sitting in the lotus position, suggesting her interest in Buddhism.³⁵ The other is a head and shoulders portrait, freely painted in predominantly blue shades. Angus' elongated face and mournful expression are emphasised. (Fig. 19)³⁶

Angus records that Schoon was photographing "plant forms" at that time.³⁷ In 1944 he sketched a portrait of Dennis Knight Turner (Fig. 20). It is in the vein of his early neo-romantic work, very much in the manner of John Minton—skilfully done but entirely conventional graphic art.³⁸ Also in 1944, Schoon wrote an article called "Oriental Dancing and the Trance" published in *The Arts in New Zealand*.³⁹ Here Schoon describes the trance and subconscious as being identical, and shows knowledge of Freud and automatism consistent with an interest in Surrealism.

It was in 1944 or possibly late 1943 that John Money, the sexologist, first met Schoon at a party of university students in Wellington. Schoon was visiting the capital and Money was a graduate student at the Victoria College of the University of New Zealand, as Victoria University was then known. They met again in Dunedin in 1945, where Money was a Junior Lecturer at Otago College (later Otago University), and became friends. Money says of his collecting of Schoon's work, "His art chose me. It had great aesthetic appeal to me and I wanted to live with it."⁴⁰ Money was in no doubt as to Schoon's genius:

When Theo Schoon painted my portrait in January 1947 at his camp near Pleasant Point, I recognized that he had extraordinarily precise and rapid visual-motor coordination – a prerequisite of graphic genius. He was an esthetic prowler, ever finding new challenges on which to project his genius.

³⁴ Dunn, op.cit., pp. 86-87.

³⁵ Dunn, op.cit., p. 84-85. Details unknown.

³⁶ Dunn, op.cit., pp. 83 & 85. Oil on board, dimensions unknown, held in private collection, Christchurch.

³⁷ *Rita Angus*, catalogue. Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982, p. 5.

³⁸ Pastel on paper, 62.5 cm x 48.5 cm, Rotorua Museum of Art.

³⁹ T. Schoon, "Oriental Dancing and the Trance." *The Arts in New Zealand*, Dec 1944–Jan. 1945, Vol. 17, No. 1. pp. 42–46.

⁴⁰ Dr John Money, email to author, 8 Jan 2003.

He was not esthetic in everyday living, and lived much of the time as if in self-imposed poverty and material squalor.⁴¹

The early 1940s is often represented as the beginning of modernist concerns in New Zealand art, although this had in fact begun in the 1890s with the European-trained painters Petrus van der Velden, Girolamo Nerli, and James Nairn. More properly it marks the genesis of a nationally distinct artistic vernacular and the first local experiments with abstraction. In 1945 A. R. D. Fairburn claimed "The New Zealand public does not know what [modern] European art is."⁴² In general that is probably true. Dianne and Peter Beatson, Robert Leonard, Michael King and others place the start of New Zealand's era of modern art at around 1945, whereas Francis Pound, by contrast, places it with the flowering of Walters and McCahon (and by implication, Schoon's transition to abstraction) in 1950.⁴³ It is, perhaps, better to view the evolution as more of a gradual, natural transition derived from a number of external influences and internal pressures over time—which Schoon was involved with from 1939—rather than any sudden, abrupt revolution.

The artistic community in Wellington in the 1940s included other artists from Europe with interests in modernism outside of British trends. Schoon almost certainly would have met Frederick Ost at the Wellington Sketch and Studio club and the French Maid Coffee House.⁴⁴ Ost (1905–1985) arrived in New Zealand from Czechoslovakia as a refugee in 1940. Like Schoon, Ost had trained in painting and graphic design, and produced ultra-modernist Cubist and Expressionist art. His abstract variations on tiki forms after the manner of Picasso and Braque are particularly intriguing as a possible influence on Schoon.⁴⁵

The French Maid coffee house operated in Lambton Quay from 1940 to 1952 and was started by A. D. Singleton after his success with a coffee bar at the

⁴¹ Money, 2003.

⁴² A. R. D. Fairburn, "Auckland Letter" *Art in New Zealand* 68, June–July 1945, p. 36.

⁴³ P. Cleave, "Francis Pound: History, Art and the Semi-colon." *Illusions* 26, Winter 1997, p. 43.

⁴⁴ L. Bell, "A Series of Displacements: An Introduction to the Art of Frederick Ost (1905–1985)." *Art New Zealand* 86, Autumn, 1998, pp. 64–68.

⁴⁵ Bell, 1998, pp. 64–68.

New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in Wellington. The French Maid exhibited and sold work by Schoon, as well as by Ian Richdale, Elizabeth Hepburn, Florence Hislop, Bruce Henry and others.⁴⁶

After the Storm: The Years Following the Second World War

Germany surrendered to the Allies in May 1945. In the Pacific, the Japanese fought on until the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima three months later. Nominal peace returned. In the South-East Indies, the Japanese had withdrawn, and a war for independence was ripping Java apart. The Dutch Empire, at its greatest extent fifty-five times the size of the Netherlands, folded at one blow. The Dutch were never able to meaningfully re-secure the Dutch East Indies after the Japanese occupation of 1941–45 and the newly independent Republic of Indonesia was formally proclaimed in 1950.⁴⁷

The Second World War had redrawn the cultural and artistic geography of Europe. The avant-garde had been forced to either flee the shadow of philistine Fascism, or be crushed. A mass exodus to the United States ensured that the art capital of the world was no longer Paris, but New York. The Netherlands, now free of Nazi tyranny, was left a battered husk of its former self. There could be no immediate return by Schoon.

The United States of America had ascended to become the dominant global power with the Soviet Union a close rival—the beginnings of the Cold War. New Zealand's war heroes were coming home. The return to relative peace allowed an awareness of international art trends to once more thread together in New Zealand and elsewhere.

In that year Schoon's liberated parents returned from Java, and Theo moved to Dunedin to be with them. There was another family of Schoons living in Dunedin, but they appear to have been unrelated.⁴⁸ Sometime between the end

⁴⁶ N. Ashworth and J. Chrisholm, *Artist & Bon Vivant, A Memoir of Bruce Henry*. Auckland: Steele Roberts Ltd. and The Bruce Henry Book Trust Aotearoa New Zealand, 2001, p. 69.

⁴⁷ N. Davies, *Europe: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 1069.

⁴⁸ M. J. Schoon, letter to author, undated, 2001

of 1945 and 1947, in Christchurch, Schoon took a photographic portrait of Rita Angus. (Fig. 20)⁴⁹

Living in Dunedin at the time was British-trained, modernist artist-potter-teacher R. N. Field (1899–1987), a teacher at King Edward VII Technical College. Field had studied beside Moore and Hepworth at the Royal College of Art, London, and became mentor to Toss Woollaston, Doris Lusk, Anne Hamblett, Patrick Hayman and Colin McCahon. William J. Reed was teaching at the Dunedin School of Art. Other prominent artists included Rona Dyer, Colin Wheeler and the prominent studio photographer Morris Kershaw. Other artists working in Dunedin at the time included Rodney Kennedy, Dick Seelye, Max Walker, Kathleen L. Salmond (a cousin of Doris Lusk), Ralph Little, Myra Thompson, H. V. Miller and Dr A. H. McLintock. A core group of the younger artists was at this time based in rooms over the United Friendly Society in Moray Place.⁵⁰ Schoon could have seen work by these artists in the Sixty-Ninth Annual Exhibition of the Otago Art Society, which took place that year.⁵¹

James K. Baxter had just published his first major book of poetry, *Beyond the Palisades*, and was already declining into alcoholism. Writer, art patron and founder of the literary periodical *Landfall*, Charles Brasch had returned to Dunedin from Britain. McCahon was in Dunedin in August with his wife Ann for their exhibition *Pictures for Children*.⁵² The year 1945 coincided with a period of rapid growth for the collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery with many new acquisitions, including G. P. Nerli's lush, flamboyant and heavily impastoed oil *Aïda* the year before.⁵³

⁴⁹ Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

⁵⁰ G. Thompson, "Morris Kershaw (1912–1977), Photographer of an Era." *Art New Zealand* 105, Summer 2002–03, p. 75; L. Tyler, *Women on Women: Art in Dunedin since 1893*. Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1993, p. 42, n. 22.

⁵¹ P. Hunt (Assistant Curator of Pictorial Collections, Hocken Library, Dunedin), email to author, 9 Jan 2003.

⁵² M. Bloem and R. Fuchs, *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith*. Nelson and Amsterdam: Craig Potton and the Stedelijk Museum, 2002, p. 70.

⁵³ P. Entwisle, *Treasures of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery*. Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1990, p. 24.

A number of critics of modernist art were not prepared to concede to the nascent new order. A. R. D. Fairburn continued his attacks on modernism, which he saw as dangerous and alien to New Zealand artistic concerns. In 1947, probably with Colin McCahon in mind, he described as “falsity ... the efforts of a Pig Islander [New Zealander] to paint like Picasso.”⁵⁴ Modernism had yet to fully establish itself in New Zealand. The same year Schoon was complaining about New Zealand’s “fake galleries, fake teachers ... [and] fake traditions.”⁵⁵ Perhaps in his reference to “fake teachers”, he was rather unfairly recalling his time as a student at the school in Christchurch. A year later in 1948, the artist Roland Hipkins would write in the British periodical *The Studio*, “The impact of modernism ... is only just being felt in New Zealand.”⁵⁶

Schoon at this time was also interested in the national literature. A letter from Dr John Money to Janet Frame records Schoon’s opinion of her short story *Alison Hendry* (published in May 1947) as being “one of the rare examples of true artistry he had come across in this philistine country.”⁵⁷ These literary interests seem further demonstrated by his association with the poet James K. Baxter who moved to Christchurch in late 1947.

The year 1948 is famous in New Zealand art history as the year the Christchurch City Council refused the gift by the Canterbury Society of Arts of Frances Hodgkins’ painting *Pleasure Garden*. Hodgkins, perhaps New Zealand’s most famous expatriate artist, already enjoyed a great reputation in Europe and Britain. “The *Pleasure Garden* controversy”, as it became known, divided the Christchurch art community well into 1949.⁵⁸ Also around this time Schoon was regularly babysitting the children of the Summers family. Llew Summers, the sculptor, recalls Schoon’s “very thin, elegant hands”, while Faith Wright (née Summers), his sister, has a picture of a rooster Schoon drew to entertain her—echoing the kiln worker who amused the young Schoon with

⁵⁴ A. R. D. Fairburn, “Some Reflections in New Zealand Painting.” *Landfall* 1, March 1947[b], p. 52.

⁵⁵ T. Schoon, letter to A. R. D. Fairburn, Duntroon, 2 June 1947. MSS & Archives A-125.17, University of Auckland, no page number.

⁵⁶ R. Hipkins, “Contemporary Art in New Zealand.” *The Studio* 135, April 1948, p. 109.

⁵⁷ M. King, *Wrestling with the Angel: a life of Janet Frame*. London: Viking, 2000, p. 92.

⁵⁸ *The Press*, Christchurch, 18 June 1949.

clay animals all those years ago in Java. Mrs Connie Summers, the mother of Llew and Faith, describes Schoon as not being a regular bather and having something of an unpleasant odour. This association came about through the tendency of the John Summers of “adopting” young artists and writers, after he had met Schoon in the Whitcombe and Tombs bookshop where Summers worked.⁵⁹ It seems likely that Schoon may have met many of the bohemian set through the Summers family.

In 1948, Schoon painted *Portrait of the Poet James K. Baxter as a Young Man*. (Fig. 22)⁶⁰ The title of the work clearly references the title of James Joyce’s (1882–1941) novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* suggesting a literary awareness on the painter’s part. The painting employs the sgraffito technique of drawing or scratching through the wet paint with a pointed instrument to delineate the subject in an Expressionist manner. The overall effect is reminiscent of the neo-romantic work of Lucian Freud and John Minton. This can be seen in its heavily dramatic use of chiaroscuro bringing out much of Baxter’s brooding character, as well as the slightly Modigliani, or possibly El Greco-like features and downcast, introspective gaze.

There is a photograph of Baxter, taken by Schoon around this time in the Christchurch garden of a Dr Milligan⁶¹ (collection of George Johnson, Melbourne), probably as a study for the painting. It shows the young poet in a black roll-neck pullover in the kind of dramatic “author” profile pose that would have been familiar from the London-based Penguin *New Writing* booklets of the period. At this stage Schoon had made no great leap to modernist abstractions. He produced satirical “cartoons” of great sophistication

⁵⁹ Ursula Ryan (nee Summers), conversations with author, November 2002–January 2003.

⁶⁰ Oil on board, signed and dated 1948, 63 cm x 52.5 cm, private collection. Put up for auction (lot 544 with an abstract design from 1964 (lot 545), Webb’s catalogue, July 1997, p. 51, with an estimated value of NZ\$25,000–35,000. It did not sell, and was put up again for auction at the Christchurch Centre of Contemporary Art in 2001 and 2002, where it still did not sell.

⁶¹ Presumably Dr R. R. D. Milligan, a stomach surgeon who lived in Scarborough, Christchurch. His daughter Diedre married Roger Duff. He was a friend of Rita Angus, a patron of the arts and a member of the Pacifist movement. He later retired to Maungonui, and in 1964 wrote and published the book (Ed. J. Dunmore), *The Map Drawn by Chief Tuki-Tahua in 1793*. (Remiscence of Constance Summers, passed on by Ursula Ryan, conversation with author, 17 June 2003.)

on the theme of High Society. (Figs. 25-26)⁶² What these very sophisticated lampoons suggest is that the Rotterdam Academy had trained him as an illustrator and commercial artist, as well as a painter and photographer. This is consistent with what is known of the well-rounded academic training Rotterdam provided. His portraits of this period were standard figurative work and not particularly unusual. H. V. Miller even described them as “pretty” and “disappointingly ordinary”.⁶³ The use of the word “disappointingly” seems very suggestive. Did Schoon already have a reputation as a highly talented artist to live up to? It would seem so.

His paintings of this period, like the work of Adele Younghusband, May Smith, Rita Angus and Lois White, are primarily only “modernist” in that they employ the stylised “essential forms” of modernism. An encounter with New Zealand’s other main culture—Māori—in the Otago Museum in Dunedin, however, would completely change how Schoon thought about art.

The Rock Drawings

In 1950, the Department of Internal Affairs gave Schoon’s copies of Māori rock art to the Canterbury Museum on permanent loan (figs. 36-41).⁶⁴ However, it was at the Otago Museum, five years earlier, that he first encountered the rock drawings that would become so central to his work.

In 1916, Dr J. Elmore, a spiritualist from Kansas, commenced chiselling out rock drawings for removal to “safety” (i.e. the United States) in the belief that New Zealanders had no regard for them—Tony Fomison called it “typified ... overseas prejudice”. These activities were eventually curtailed by the New Zealand authorities, preventing the export of the cut blocks, and the drawings

⁶² Images appear in *Art in New Zealand* 57, Sept 1942, p. 28 and 29. The cartoons resemble the pre-war German *Nieue Sachlichkeit* satirical-ironic expressionism of Otto Dix, George Grosz and Max Beckman.

⁶³ H. V. Miller, “Otago Painters, Survey of the Dunedin Exhibition.” *Art in New Zealand* 59, March 1943, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Canterbury Museum Accessions Register for 14 March 1950, pp. 203–204. Reference is also made to the Canterbury Museum Annual Report 1949–1950.

were placed in the collection of the Otago Museum in Dunedin.⁶⁵ It is also possible that Schoon may have first come into contact with the distinctive forms of Polynesian art through Rotterdam's Museum Voor Volkenkunde.⁶⁶

He described his experience of Māori art as being “no longer the trained seal balancing a ball on the end of its nose for no better reason than the reward of a fish at the end”.⁶⁷ This epiphany then led Schoon to scour the Waitaki and Opihi River areas of the South Canterbury interior for similar drawings, and caused him to make contact with Roger Duff, Curator of Ethnology and later Director of the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.⁶⁸ Although initially Duff was dismissive of the rock drawings as mere “doodles”,⁶⁹ Schoon eventually won him (albeit half-heartedly) over to the cause. In October 1945, Duff delivered an address to the Canterbury Historical Society on Schoon's findings. In 1946 as a result of Duff's efforts on his behalf, Schoon was employed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to make painted copies of the rock drawings.⁷⁰

In the first half of the twentieth century, the disciplines of anthropology (*volkenkunde*) and folklore studies (*volskunde*) became very highly developed and valued in Dutch academia. A basic requirement of these disciplines within the Dutch academic system was that the researcher regularly enters the field and personally observe and experience the customs and practices being studied.⁷¹ Perhaps this also filtered into art education as Schoon took to this approach enthusiastically. In 1946, when Schoon first went into the field, Duff

⁶⁵ T. Fomison, “An exploratory survey of Maori Rock-Shelter Art in South Canterbury.” *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter* Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1962, p. 119.

⁶⁶ S. Greub (Ed.), *Expressions of Belief: Masterpieces of African, Oceanic and Indonesian Art from the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam*. New York: Rizzoli, 1988.

⁶⁷ T. Schoon, letter to Malcom Ross, 9 May 1984. Miscellaneous MSS. 1366, p. 3. Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin.

⁶⁸ Duff provided another connection to the New Zealand art world through his sister, the sculptor Alison Duff.

⁶⁹ R. S. Duff, “Maori Art in Rock Drawing”, *Arts Yearbook* 6, 1950, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Rumsey, 1995a, p. 25 and *Nga tuhituhi o nehera* (Exhibition Catalogue). Oamaru: Forrester Gallery, 1986.

⁷¹ R. van Ginkel and B. Henkes, “On Peasants and ‘Primitive Peoples’: Moments of Rapprochements and Distance between Folklore Studies and Anthropology in the Netherlands.” *Ethnos* 68:1, 2003, p. 115.

was charged by the Department of Internal Affairs to oversee him.⁷² His field book entries make a fascinating record of Schoon's practice of retouching rock drawings and Duff's changing attitudes to this method.

(17 Oct. 1946) The early afternoon to inspect Gould's Taniwha cave where by judicious restoration, Theo has brought up previously scarcely recognisable figure.

(12 Nov. 1946) Skilfully [sic] retouched by black crayon.

(15 Nov, 1946) ...brought up by Theo in 4 days tedious retouching ... Figures greatly improved by accurate and painstaking retouching...

(19 Mar. 1947. Upper Waitaki) ...red ochre probably drawn on as with sheep raddle, as too pointedly demonstrated by Theo in going over the drawings to freshen them up...

March 20th. During a long discussion on previous night, obtained a promise from Theo that he would not restore any figures in future ... During day, Theo got on with his usual method of attacking a shelter—first photographs (NB, no photographs taken before other figures restored)⁷³

Indeed, Duff almost completely ignored the existence of the rock drawings (and nowhere acknowledges Schoon's work) in his book *The Moa-Hunter Period of Maori Culture*.⁷⁴

It was on this expedition that Dr Money made his observations about Schoon's hand-eye skills. It is here that Schoon most closely reaches the ideals of Piet Zwart's Bauhaus-influenced photography, taught to him back in Rotterdam - to be a human camera.⁷⁵

It is perhaps unfair to criticise Schoon excessively for his retouching of the rock drawings, because he was responsible for finding a number of previously unknown sites, and he certainly was not the only retoucher. Indeed, it is difficult to discern who did what—Schoon used greasy crayon, others used Indian ink or outlining in chalk.⁷⁶ The initial misdemeanour is somewhat

⁷² T. Fomison, "Theo Schoon and the Retouching of Rock Art." *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sept 1987), p. 159.

⁷³ Fomison, 1987, p. 159.

⁷⁴ R. S. Duff, *The Moa-Hunter Period of Maori Culture*. 3rd edition. Wellington: E. C. Keating (Government Printer), 1977.

⁷⁵ Money, 2003.

⁷⁶ P. and P. Russell, "Little-Known Maori Rock Art: A Sad Story." In *L'Art avant histoire: la conservation de l'art préhistorique*. Paris: L'Institut International de conservation, May 2002, p. 120.

mitigated by the results. Books on Māori rock art did not appear until the 1970s⁷⁷ and this owes much to his highlighting of a unique national treasure—New Zealand’s “oldest art galleries”—which he described as “frozen poetry in which the very soul of the mythopoetic Polynesian has been crystallised.”⁷⁸ Also, it was because of his unrelenting promotion of the rock art’s importance, that a number of articles were published on it from 1947 to 1949.⁷⁹

Lara Strongman, curator of contemporary art at Wellington’s City Gallery, has written:

He was among the first of the Pākehā researchers last century to promulgate a view of the rock drawings as fine examples of Māori art, evidence of sophisticated cultural achievement rather than the “idle scribbles of nomadic Maori tribesmen sheltering from the rain”.⁸⁰

Indeed, there is some evidence that Schoon’s retouching was only minor, and that often he did little more than outline drawings with soft charcoal before making a freehand interpretation on paper, making subtle changes to suit himself.⁸¹

Roger Duff told artist Eric Lee-Johnson of Schoon’s work on the petroglyphs and Lee-Johnson was sufficiently impressed to incorporate his version of a rock drawing eagle into the cover design for *The Arts Year Book* 6.⁸² What remained with Schoon’s abstract drawings from his study of the rock art is the sinuosity of his forms, which are often clustered together, sometimes overlapping and always flatly schematic. Schoon had created a new persona for himself as a Primitivist artist.

My [Schoon] interest in Rock drawings began as an art student in Rotterdam Holland. I was not satisfied with the standard obligatory art history books

⁷⁷ M. Trotter and B. McCulloch, *Prehistoric Rock Art of New Zealand*. Wellington: Reed Books, 1971; M. Dunn, *Maori Rock Art*. Wellington: Reed Books, 1972; P. Thompson, *Maori Rock Art*, Wellington: GP Books, 1989.

⁷⁸ T. Schoon, “New Zealand’s Oldest Art Galleries.” *New Zealand Listener*, 12 Sept 1947.

⁷⁹ See Appendix 1.

⁸⁰ L. Strongman, “Your History Goes Way Back: Tony Fomison and Taranaki.” In *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*. Wellington: City Gallery, 2001, p. 158. Strongman quotes N. Roberts, *Maori Rock Drawing and Theo Schoon*, In Roberts (Ed.), 2000b.

⁸¹ M. Trotter and B. McCulloch, “Frenchmans Gully and Theo Schoon”, *Archaeology in New Zealand* 43, 2, 2000, p. 146.

⁸² E. Lee-Johnson, *No Road to Follow, Autobiography of a New Zealand Artist*. Auckland: Godwit, 1994, pp. 134–5. Ironically, this is the issue in which Duff aggressively downplays the artistic merits of Māori rock art in his article “Maori Art in Rock Drawing” (Duff, 1950).

required by art history professors, at the school of art. The art of my time—modern artists had already for some time explored museum collections for the art of mankind on a global scale, beyond the academic range of civilisations which laid the foundations for “Western art.” This was promptly nourished by a growing number of books on primitive art; Asian, African, Pacifican and Amerind art. There was a voracious appetite for this material amongst the young artists of my generation in Europe. Any new book in this field was eagerly snapped up by any art student who could afford it. It was in a department store, where I found my first book on African Rock drawings by Prof. [Leo] Frobenius and later another one on Amerindian rock drawings.⁸³

In the above statement, Schoon consciously aligns himself with Primitivist art practice in terms of generation, geography and interest. He defines it (also using the expression “modern”) as “the art of my time.” As Rangihiroa Panoho has written, “[T]o the amazement of some of his contemporaries, Schoon saw Māori and not European art as the only major art tradition in this country”.⁸⁴

The study of “primitive” art has made it evident that art was primarily a psychological matter and that modern artists responded to line, form and colour in strikingly similar ways even though no cultural link or exchange could have existed. Schoon regularly mentioned the similarity between certain modern European art and that found in various rock shelters throughout New Zealand.⁸⁵

It is debatable as to whether Schoon himself can be described as a “Primitivist” because it is the design and aesthetic sophistication of the art of Māori and Rolfe Hattaway he responded to rather than a pure rejection of the mannered nature of bourgeois art. “Primitivism” does serve, however, to illustrate a historically established movement to which, consciously or unconsciously, Schoon was reacting. The best example of this is an untitled woodblock print⁸⁶ based around a fugue of more-or-less traditional koru-based kowhaiwhai

⁸³ T. Schoon, letter to Neil Roberts, Feb 1985, p. 1. Collection of Neil Roberts, Christchurch. Schoon does not clarify to which of Frobenius’ texts he is referring. There are three likely candidates: “Rock Art of the Saharan Atlas”, “Rock Art of the Fezzan”, and “Rock Art of South Africa” *Leo Frobenius 1873-1973*, Wiesbaden, 1973 (pp. 78–82, 83–92 and 93–109). The reference to a Frobenius work on Native Americans seems erroneous, as no such text is known to exist. Thanks is due to Dr Edith Platte of the Frobenius Institut, Frankfurt for her help with this issue.

⁸⁴ R. Panoho, “Māori: At the Centre, on the Margins.” In M. Barr (Ed.), *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992, p. 133.

⁸⁵ “Early Rock Drawings in Danger: Dutch Artist fears Dominion may lose Valuable Relics.” *The Southern Cross*, 5 Feb 1949, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Gow Langsford catalogue Sept 19–Oct 7 2000. Item #50. (*Polynesian Abstract*) 19.5 x 31.8 cm. Private collection of Jenny Gibbs, Auckland.

patterns spreading in a pleasing self-deconstructive way, eventually evolving into French Curve-like spirals and sine waveforms. (Fig. 46) It is far more obviously derivative of Māori koru patterns than most work produced by Gordon Walters.

It is interesting to speculate on why Schoon's "vision" was so drastically different when the colonial experience is so often generalised as virtually identical. Schoon, as an outsider, had eyes to see what for others was invisible—whether he thought of those eyes as Academy-trained, or aesthetically innocent. When the Māori "Renaissance" blossomed in the 1960s, Schoon seems not to have thought much of the young Māori artists it produced, and ironically, whom he indirectly influenced through *Te Ao Hou*. In fact, he simply did not understand the new aggressive and proactive Māori activism.⁸⁷

A demoralised people do not believe any more in the power and substance of a legacy. This generation of Māori "artists" confront their legacy with the dessicated minds of Pākehā art school teachers ...⁸⁸

This is contrary to the vision of someone like Gordon Tovey for example (National Supervisor of Arts and Crafts from 1944 to 1966) and the policy of the Sir Walter Nash's new 1958 Labour government:

That if the two cultures in New Zealand ... might be brought equally together, a new, and as yet unimaginable National culture might be born in some marvellous year, a culture neither Māori or Pākehā, as presently known, but the child of both.⁸⁹

Indeed, Schoon describes the "new Maori art teachers" as coming "to the job with a cocktail shaker and a happy go lucky notion of mixing a little of this and that without any research on compatibilities."⁹⁰

It would also appear that Schoon harboured visions of returning some day to a Bali (somewhat as the Australian artist Donald Friend did) that simply no longer existed. "In Bali I can have a dialogue with artists who still know their

⁸⁷ John Perry, telephone conversation with author, 30 Nov 2002.

⁸⁸ T. Schoon, letter to Malcolm Ross, 9 May 1984, p. 1. (Copy), Miscellaneous MSS. 1366, Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin.

⁸⁹ F. Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art*. Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994, p. 156.

⁹⁰ Schoon to Ross, 1984, p. 2.

stuff in their own idiom.”⁹¹ We are left with the impression of a bitter old man with only his contempt to cling to. Certainly he would be feeling a general shift in attitudes to his own appropriation of Māori material. With the Māori Renaissance of the 1960s, Māori began to “question and define exactly how their culture should be formulated, sited and consumed in a settler society like New Zealand.”⁹²

It is difficult to know if Schoon intended his art to be a whakamāoritanga (not a “translation”, so much as a diplomatic vehicle of Māori cultural identity) or mihi (acknowledgement) of Māori culture bound up in the principles of manaaki (showing kindness), kaitiaki (guardianship) and utu (reciprocity). Schoon’s perceptions of Māori seem to have been just as hubristically pre-conditioned as anyone else’s, to the point where he thought he understood more about Māori visual culture than Māori did themselves. He saw himself in the role of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) over traditional visual kaupapa (methodology). Immense value lies in his provision of new perspectives to Māori. This became increasingly evident in his old age to the point where he claimed that Māori art teachers and elders had long forgotten their special knowledge, and were making up most of what they taught as they went along.⁹³

At the time Schoon was “discovering” classical Māori art in the early “swinging” 1960s, Māori were beginning to recognise their own dissatisfaction at the way they were positioned in New Zealand art history. Sidney Moko Mead was to write:

A part of the reason for writing *The Art of Maori Carving* was my reaction to beliefs common at the time [circa 1961] that a distinctive New Zealand art could be developed by taking large chunks of the Western art traditions of the New Zealand Pākehā and colouring that largish portion with a thin layer of the art traditions of the Maori. I was reacting, too, at an intuitive level against uncritical acceptance of the idea that Maori sent to art schools would automatically produce a new sort of New Zealand art.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Schoon to Ross, 1984, p. 2.

⁹² D. Skinner, “Finding the Family Resemblance: Gordon Tovey and the Tovey Generation.” *Art New Zealand* 91, Winter 1999[b], p. 65.

⁹³ Schoon to Ross, 1984, *passim.*, p.1.

⁹⁴ S. M. Mead, *Te Toi Whakairo: The Art of Maori Carving*. Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986, p. 2.

Schoon appreciated this point of view, although he did not understand the radicalised art it produced. It is possible to delineate the structures that engendered Schoon because

the Post-modern has made some features of the postcolonial visible or speakable for the colonisers reassuringly strange and safely subversive, just as Orientalism did in an earlier stage of colonial ideology.⁹⁵

Post-War Development in New Zealand Art

An interesting event that tells much about Schoon's artistic philosophy also occurred in 1949, when the painter Sam Cairncross (1913–1976) was accused in the *New Zealand Listener* by a correspondent hiding behind the pseudonym "Vincent", of having plagiarised Rembrandt's *Flayed Ox* for an illustration (the painting *On the Hooks*) in a previous *Listener*. Actually, Cairncross had plagiarised Rembrandt no more than had the Lithuanian/French Expressionist Chaim Soutine (1894–1943) in the 1930s. Schoon came to Cairncross' defence in the *Listener*'s letters column. "No painter can escape the influences of his contemporaries or his predecessors," he wrote, and went on to dismiss Cairncross' painting as an "empty pod", whereas Rembrandt's was "a giant flower."⁹⁶ Cairncross had studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, and under artist/writer André Lhote in 1947–1948, so this judgment is, perhaps, somewhat unfair. This is a dramatic contrast to the Schoon who claimed to have rejected European art, as it is a direct acknowledgement of his and all artists' interconnectedness with art history and their contemporaries. It suggests that Schoon retained a burning pride in his Dutch cultural inheritance.

On 2 June 1947, Schoon initiated correspondence with A. R. D. Fairburn, supplying photographs of rock drawings, which Fairburn would later utilise as decorative motifs in fabric designs. Schoon ceased his fieldwork in 1948.⁹⁷ The period 1947–1949 marked a small outpouring of articles on the rock drawing work by himself and others including Fairburn. Even at this stage Schoon was

⁹⁵ V. Mishra and B. Hodge, "What is Post(-)colonialism?" In P. Williams and L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 289.

⁹⁶ D. Ramage. "On the Hooks." In "Letters from Listeners", *New Zealand Listener*, 6 May, 1949, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Roberts, 1985; Rumsey 1995a.

quite unmanageable. A letter from Bill Vance of the Department of Internal Affairs to Roger Duff recalls:

As always, you are again right about Theo. The last I heard out of him was an urgent wire from him C/O the Rotorua Police Station asking me to wire him some money. I fell for it. He has ignored my appeals to send me his prints so that the Department could purchase a selection of them from him.⁹⁸

This 1949 letter seems to suggest that Schoon had become restless again and was once more on the move, eventually ending up in Auckland. That year also saw a new tangent in his life and practice—Schoon began work as a nurse at the Avondale Mental Hospital. While there he developed an interest in “Outsider” art when he started collecting the drawings and poetry of the patient Rolfe Hattaway. Unfortunately, Schoon would be sacked from the Hospital after a few months for supplying the patients with drawing materials.

Rolfe Hattaway and the Art Of Madness

Rolfe Hattaway (1907–1970), a psychiatric patient at the hospital where Schoon worked as a nurse, was a profound influence on Schoon’s creative process. Hattaway was born in Auckland and may have had some formal art training at the Elam School of Fine Arts there. The early life of Hattaway remains somewhat obscure, but while in Sydney in the mid-1920s he suffered a particularly violent attack – perhaps for his alleged homosexuality - which caused permanent trauma. Ultimately, after a lengthy stay at his family’s home under restraint, He was diagnosed in 1937 as a schizophrenic. Hattaway was a resident at Avondale until the death of his parents in the early 1950s, when he was transferred to the Lake Alice facility near Wanganui.

Hattaway’s condition expressed itself as symptomatic social disorganisation and a tendency to withdraw. He was able to follow instructions, but did not speak. He did, however, manage to produce a large body of drawings, working whenever the opportunity presented itself.⁹⁹ When Schoon first encountered him, Hattaway would express himself by drawing on the hospital’s asphalt yard

⁹⁸ W. Vance, letter to R. S. Duff, 21 Jan 1949, Departmental Archives, 6/10 Ethnology, Folder 25B, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

with dried lumps of clay, producing patterns “linear and abstract in nature”¹⁰⁰ up to seven metres long, which were hosed away each day.¹⁰¹

Schoon, openly acknowledging Hattaway’s influence on him in correspondence with Gordon Walters,¹⁰² began by copying Hattaway’s outdoor drawings. According to Schoon, it was also this interest that caused his employment with the hospital to be terminated.

One day as I was kneeling on the yard, copying his [Hattaway’s] drawings, Dr Palmer arrived in stately procession flanked by two old hand attendants, like a Henry the Eighth making his entrance at court, questioning me why I was copying the drawings. I replied because they are artistically fascinating and clever. Palmer snorted in true style, “What! you consider that art! My notion of great art is Michelangelo!!” It is of course, the semi-literate colonial’s perfect platitude that serves every occasion where cultural erudition is required. Soon after I was requested to resign as an attendant because of this irregular, odd hobby, outside my course of normal duty.¹⁰³

In 1937, an international expert on outsider and children’s art education, Canadian Arthur Lismer (a Group of Seven painter) visited Australia and New Zealand on a lecture tour.¹⁰⁴ Despite such impetus, madness was not an important part of New Zealand art discourse in the first half of the twentieth century, although in Europe, it was being explored by the likes of Klee.¹⁰⁵ By comparison, children’s art, however, was of great prominence in New Zealand, partly connected with this country’s (for the time) advanced education system founded in some socialist values. In *Art in New Zealand* (1938), Roland Hipkins wrote that a certain kind of educational environment was necessary in order for a child to:

respond and on his own volition produce unsophisticated and genuine expressions of his inner consciousness ... The drawings that children do

⁹⁹ D. Skinner, *Hattaway, Schoon, Walters; Madness and Modernism*. Auckland: Lopdell House Gallery, 1997, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ T. Schoon, letter to M. Dunn, 22 Oct 1982, p. 2. Cited M. Dunn, *The Art of Gordon Walters*. Auckland: University of Auckland, 1982(a), Thesis: PhD: Art History, p. 52.

¹⁰¹ Dunn, 1982a, p. 52.

¹⁰² T. Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, Kempsey, Australia, n.d., p. 2 and 4. MSS. 90, Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.

¹⁰³ Schoon to Dunn, 1982, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ J. Smith, “Historical Developments in the field of Art Education, Internationally and in New Zealand.” Centre for the Arts, Auckland College of Education. 1999. Available on line: www.ace.ac.nz/doclibrary/word/arts/smith/HistDvlpmntsArtEd.doc.

¹⁰⁵ P. Klee, Untitled art review. *Die Alpen* 6, No. 5, 1912, p. 32.

secretly for their own satisfaction when left entirely alone and without any impulse from without are the only really genuine products of child art.¹⁰⁶

This is something Fairburn would explore nearly a decade later.¹⁰⁷ There is some correlation in the Western mind between the complex expressionistic designs of the mad, Māori, and children, traditionally ascribed to the “naive gaze” Schoon aligns himself to “outsider art” and perhaps anticipates art as a psychological therapy.

The term “outsider art” was adopted during the revolution of psychoanalysis in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, French surrealist Jean Dubuffet conceived of Art Brut, encompassing all self-taught, obsessional creators unmotivated by market forces or the need for an audience. Dubuffet's prototypical “artist brut” was Adolf Wolfli, a German schizophrenic in a Bern asylum whose 25,000 page books told bizarre hallucinatory epics in intricate text, collage and illustrated musical scores. In effect, Hattaway was Schoon's Wolfli.¹⁰⁸ It is, however, quite possible that Schoon was influenced by a much earlier incident. His encounter with Hattaway may have reminded him of a *cause célèbre* in the Java of the late 1930s. An exceptionally talented Russian modernist artist by the name of Alexander Kulesh was “discovered” in a Jakarta mental hospital and exhibited by the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* in July 1937.¹⁰⁹

Hattaway's Influence

Schoon's art is very much driven by the line (in the vocabulary of Vasari, he was an artist of *Disegno* rather than *Colore*), which is something he learned from studying Hattaway's drawings. (Figs. 27-33) The implication is that though Schoon was aiming for the abstract, he was in fact imposing a structure on a true abstract expression. This may be observed in the crude figurative drawings produced by Hattaway when he became “aware” of Schoon's interest. (Figs. 34-35)

¹⁰⁶ R. Hopkins, “Children's Art.” *Art in New Zealand*, Sept 1938, p. 8. Cf. Pound, 1994, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ A. R. D. Fairburn, “Child Art in New Zealand.” *New Zealand Listener*, 1 Aug 1947[a], p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ S. Steward, “Private Worlds.” *New Statesman*, 10 Sept 2001, pp. 40–41.

¹⁰⁹ Haks and Maris, 1995, p. 159.

There are certain similarities between Hattaway's output and the traditional Māori art that fascinated Schoon—the importance of line, positive and negative relations and a restricted palette,¹¹⁰ in keeping with the Minimalist and Primitivist tendencies in modernist art at the time. Schoon incorporated Hattaway's distinctive motifs and style into his own work, turning to coloured lines rather than areas of colour, and the juxtaposition of organic phallic motifs and reticular armatures. The similarity with Paul Klee's "Taking a line for a walk" drawings seems, however, to be even more profound.

The primary ingredients of Schoon's 1960s abstract phase are derived from Hattaway, paralleling the theories being explored by Surrealists and Neoplasticists much earlier in Europe:

I [Schoon] have no pictures of my own stuff beyond a dud sketch which illustrates the lot. A blinding white ground, blue, green and red luminous paint, no textures and the lines avoid slickness or neatness. They are carefully weighed for quantity of colour. The framework is in black lines, rigid, calculated, and the free automatic colour lines are superimposed. The final execution is always understated, thickening wherever it is required. Frequently very old b[lack] and white drawings have provided the starting point. Wherever the free automatic lines make a shape, the outline was wiped and made solid in that colour. So even outlines are cut out of the scheme of things. You can see, the artists are frustrated. Squinting with their noses, on the lines, it yields no secrets or techniques, and the rest remains a nagging mystery. Everything I have seen done and gathered ties in very nicely. The key of course, was Hattaway.¹¹¹

Schoon's post-Hattaway works are very similar to Klee's linear "polyphonic" paintings; for example, *Rhythms of a Painting*,¹¹² or *Swinging, Polyphonic (And a Complementary Repeat)*.¹¹³ Wilhelm Hausenstein in his *Kairuan oder eine Geschichte vom Maler Klee* (Munich 1921) draws connections between Klee's hypersensitive lines ignoring vanishing point perspective, and drawings by the Borneo Dayak people. This is virtually identical to major influences on Schoon. These are not the only similarities between the work of the two artists—Schoon collected Indonesian percussion instruments because of his interest in rhythm, and Klee would occasionally stamp out rhythms while

¹¹⁰ Skinner, 1997, p. 20.

¹¹¹ Schoon to Walters, 1965, p. 1.

¹¹² 1925, watercolour on paper, 23 x 30.5 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

¹¹³ 1931, pen and blue ink on two pieces of scratch paper, 21 x 21.3 cm, and 21 x 22.8 cm, mounted on cardboard. Kunstmuseum, Berne, Paul-Klee-Stiftung (Z792).

painting.¹¹⁴ Klee based much of his technique on ten individuals whom he called “schizophrenic masters”. Lacan suggests that schizophrenic art, and art in general, is a way of taming the world of the “real” by interposing a kind of screen.¹¹⁵ Again, this seems to be another example of the outsider Schoon reaching out to other outsiders in sympathy.

Schoon’s entire methodology regarding his calligraphic line on plane (that which Laurence Simmons describes as a “grapheme” in contrast to the “morph” for Walters’ interest in shape) thus comes from Hattaway.¹¹⁶

The Metamorphosis of Schoon

Schoon would have easily identified with the isolation of New Zealand’s nascent modernist movement, if not the individuals, much as he identified with Māori traditional artists who were marginalised by Western art practice in New Zealand. “Primitivism”, Bauhaus craft theory and formal abstraction offered a way of bringing the two together. According to Margaret Orbell:

[Schoon’s] interest in Māori art was a continuation of his earlier concerns [Bali, Java]. Again, it was partly a matter of the intrinsic strength of this tradition. (The art was there in front of him; given his talent and understanding, its presence was, to him, inescapable.) And at the time, when not much was happening, there was nothing at all to prevent an artist of European descent from studying Māori art, and allowing it to influence his own work. (This being so, the real question, I think, is why so few Pākehā artists responded to Maori art in any depth. Partly because there were very few artists with Theo’s insight and understanding of art in general, and partly—which is connected to this—because of racism.)¹¹⁷

Sometime around 1940, as a youth, the artist John Drawbridge was introduced to Schoon by art patrons Mario and Hilde Fleischl, while attending a weekly drawing class in an old house on Wellington’s Terrace with Schoon, Walters and Terry Brown (then, the ethnologist in charge of Māori and Pacific Island

¹¹⁴ G. Mücke. *Blickpunkt: Sturm, Dada, Bauhaus, Gegenwart*. Tübingen, 1925, p. 139. Cited in H. Duchting, *Paul Klee: Painting Music*. Munich and New York: Pegasus (Prestel), 1997, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ H. Foster, “Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill.” In *October* 97, Summer 2001, p. 15 and f.n. 20.

¹¹⁶ Skinner, 1997, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Orbell, 2002, p. 2.

collections at the Dominion Museum).¹¹⁸ In 1949, the painter Alison Pickmere (a student at Elam) painted a profile portrait of Schoon in the lotus position, reading a book. (Fig. 24) The painting seems to be in imitation of Gauguin.¹¹⁹

In April 1949, Schoon gave a talk on his rock drawing work to the University of Canterbury Literary Club, introducing himself as a “lunatic” who recorded Māori rock art in the “firm belief that they were works of art.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ G. O'Brien (Ed.), “Wide Open Interior.” In *John Drawbridge: Wide Open Interior*. Wellington: City Gallery and Mallinson Rendel Publishers, 2001, p. 13. The Fleischls also commissioned Colin McCahon's *Otago Peninsula* in 1945; they were his first patrons.

¹¹⁹ H. H. Tombs (Ed.), *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, No.5. Wellington: Wingfield Press, 1949, p. 78.

¹²⁰ A. H. D. Osburn, “Rock Drawings in New Zealand.” *Canta* 13 April 1949, p. 4.

CHAPTER 6

THE 1950s–1960s AND THE LEGACY

On the Move Again: The 1950s

From the point of view of the early twenty-first century, 1950s New Zealand may appear bland and self-satisfied when compared to the decades immediately before and after it, but it was, in fact, a time of revolutionary change. The teenager was born as an entity, and the rock'n'roll counterculture began. New Zealand politics were still decidedly anglophile and entrenched within the colonial mentality. The country prospered as ninety-seven percent of its dairy produce was exported to Britain. Māori began moving into the cities in greater numbers, and in 1951 Mira Szaszy and Whina Cooper founded the Māori Women's Welfare League. Approximately 750,000 immigrants sailed into New Zealand, primarily from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, to combat labour shortages. This made the country suddenly more cosmopolitan, although unlike Australia, Southern Europeans such as Italians or Greeks were not encouraged. Edmund Hillary conquered Everest in 1953, the newly-crowned Elizabeth II visited in 1954 and the All Blacks beat the Springboks in 1956. The 1950s were a bridge between the Edwardian colonial and Modern International/Nationalist cultures.¹

The year 1950 saw Schoon's departure from Auckland and his return to his quest for petroglyphs. This time searching the Waikato and Mangakino, with great success. Also that year, Schoon also constructed a hanging sculpture installation from water-worn timber collected from below Huka Falls. The sculpture was based on a rigid and highly formalised pattern of modular units

¹ "50 something." *New Zealand Listener*, 30 December, 2000, pp. 64–65.

suggesting a loose grid and the influence of Klee, Kandinsky and possibly even Alexander Calder mobiles.²

During those periods Schoon spent in Auckland in the 1950s, he could often be found at Somervell's coffee bar, central Queen Street, in the late afternoons. Among the other regulars at that cafe were Bill Willson and the other Group Architects, Gordon Walters on occasional visits from Wellington, Ian Hamilton and Rex Fairburn. It was there that Peter Webb recalls Schoon telling him "Watch out for Walters and McCahon, they are going to do some real painting in this country." Schoon also stated that Eric Westbrook, then Director of the Auckland Art Gallery, had asked him to be the principal of a new Bauhaus-style art school. Nothing eventuated from this.³ It would have been quite in keeping with Westbrook, as he and the Gallery formed a knot of Bauhaus-influenced artists, graphic designers, craft practitioners and architects working in New Zealand. These included Ilse von Randow, Frank Carpay, Patricia Perrin, Milan Mrkusich, Clifton Firth and Tibor Donner.

It is also probable at this time that Schoon was in contact with the "Rutland group" of artists. The Rutland group (flourishing between 1935 and 1958) consisted of around seventy former Elam Art School students encouraged by Slade-taught Stanley Spencer-influenced Elam head A. A. J. C. Fisher. The group included Blanche Wormald, May Smith and Louise Tilsley—who were all to become textile designers—and better-known Auckland artists such as Eric Lee-Johnson, Jack Crippen, Peggy Spicer, Helen Brown, Alison Pickmere, Vida Steinert and Joan Lillicrap. A number of the Rutland artists were interested in the possibilities suggested by bringing together Māori and Pacific motifs, and native flora and fauna, in a modernist mode. Those with a particular interest in design, worked in a mode that might be described as "Pacific modernism", drawing on Matisse's collage work.

² Skinner, 1996 [Thesis], p. 22, fig. 170 and p.155, fig. 111.

³ P. Webb, "Notes from a Fifties Diary." *Landfall* 185, April 1993, p. 17

Schoon's revisited his South-east Asian heritage around 1952. That year he constructed a Balinese dancing costume from upholstery fabrics and brass domed furniture tacks, but Maori design was never far from his mind. Over the following two years, he undertook a systematic and intensive search through museums throughout the country for hue (Māori carved gourds) and moko mokai (preserved Māori heads), in order to study and sketch them. He also photographed Goldie and Lindauer paintings around New Zealand as a resource for depictions of moko and hue. Of these two artists, even now regarded as New Zealand's "old masters", Schoon wrote,

From a European artist's point of view, Goldie and Lindauer are little more than 'calendar' artists of little or no consequence. But the fact remains that they became recording artists in New Zealand, who understood that meticulous care was one of the essentials, they became important artists in their own right, beyond the European—or old world yardsticks of values.⁴

This double-edged passage suggests that while Schoon was entirely dismissive of the talents of these artists, he recognised them as important resources, and perhaps identified with them—himself being a "recording artist" of early Māori rock drawings.

While exploring Museum collections, Schoon had also started work on decorative panels based on koru forms and a stylised mythical bird motif, for the New Zealand Forest Products head office in Auckland. This would form part of the John Crichton designed interior. He had also begun a collaborative experimental pottery project with Len Castle, one of New Zealand's most important ceramicists. Castle acknowledges that Schoon taught him how "to see" as well as the principles of pattern making.⁵

Schoon suddenly appeared at Castle's Westmere (Auckland) house one afternoon, initiating a relationship that lasted the remainder of Schoon's life, and producing some of the most individual ceramics of the decade.⁶ Castle's practice found a kind of sympathy with Schoon's in that he used local clay and

⁴ T. Schoon, letter to Michael King, undated [ca. early 1970s]. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

⁵ H. Schamroth, *100 New Zealand Craft Artists*. Auckland: Godwit, 1990, Sec. 14.

⁶ D. Lloyd-Jenkins, "A Whole World of Beauty in Itself." In *Len Castle, Potter*. Auckland: Sang Architects & Co., 2002, p. 29.

was influenced by Asian forms, particularly Japanese (Shoji Hamada (1894–1978) in especially⁷) through the writings of Bernard Leach. Between 1956 and 1957, and from 1966 to 1967, Castle travelled to Britain, Hawaii, Japan and America. Schoon decorated Castle's clay forms with interpretations of the Māori rock drawings in which their "lyrical line work knitted perfectly with the formal poetics of Castle's works." (Figs. 58-59)⁸ Castle wrote:

Theo's own work, highly sophisticated, often exotic and always brilliantly crafted, gained my admiration and respect but rarely did I feel any emotional response ... Theo's influence on me was to act obliquely. He heightened my visual awareness and reinforced my tendency to explore the natural world. Later I learnt valuable lessons from his design work, and his profound understanding of line. Shape and asymmetrical balance.⁹

Clay was a completely new medium for Schoon, and Castle quickly developed a respect for the Dutchman's persistence. Schoon rapidly learned to adapt the techniques of pottery to his own ends. His favourite technique was to use a wax resist and base glaze—a method not entirely dissimilar from the batik of his Bali. Schoon was rather disdainful of Castle's fondness for the traditional forms of classical Chinese and Japanese pottery, always urging him to adapt, change and innovate.¹⁰

Castle recalls that at the time Schoon was particularly interested in the Italian painter Giuseppe Capogrossi (1900–1972) and the way the Roman painter's stylised depictions of three-fingered hands resembled a similar motif in Pacific art. Schoon used this on pottery.¹¹ Schoon also introduced Castle to the geothermally active regions in the North Island of New Zealand.¹² Castle explored these independently, producing many magnificent photographs and ceramic objects inspired by mudpools and sulphur-encrusted steam vents.¹³

⁷ Generally considered to be Japan's greatest modern ceramicist, Shoji Hamada visited Christchurch in 1965 as part of the Pan Pacific Arts Festival in 1965, and again with an exhibition of his works in 1973. Hamada led the Japanese revival of folk traditions and was one of the founders of the Japanese Folk Craft Museum in 1936. Christchurch: *Canterbury Museum News* Autumn 2002, n.p.

⁸ Lloyd-Jenkins, 2002, p. 29.

⁹ L. Castle, *Making the Molecules Dance, A Retrospective Exhibition of Ceramics 1947-1994*. Lower Hutt: Dowse Art Museum, 1994, p. 7.

¹⁰ Len Castle, telephone conversation with author, 5 Nov 2002.

¹¹ Castle, 2002.

¹² Lloyd-Jenkins, 2002, p. 133.

¹³ Castle, 2002.

Through Castle, Schoon met ceramicist Barry Brickell in 1957. A photograph taken by Steve Rumsey in that year shows Schoon, Barry Brickell, Maurice Brickell, Joy Hanna, John Kingston and Keith Patterson together at a kiln firing at Barry Brickell's house in Tui Street, Devonport. (Fig. 60)¹⁴ They remained friends into the 1960s, and Brickell recalls often roaming Auckland with Schoon and their hand-carts, looking for clay at road-works, or compost for Schoon's gourds. He describes Schoon as "living a twenty-four hour day".¹⁵

Home Street

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Schoon lived at 12 Home Street in Arch Hill (between Newton and Grey Lynn), Auckland, where he grew his gourds and began experimenting with ink on glass, linoleum cuts, and stamp-pressed pottery. The house was bought for Schoon by Martin Pharazyn, who was part of that group of friends including Dennis Knight Turner, Gordon Walters and Rita Angus in 1941. In 1956 Pharazyn found Schoon living in the loft of a smelter workshop in Yelverton Terrace (later demolished to make way for Mayoral Drive and Civic Administration building). Schoon was sleeping in a nest of fabric off-cuts gathered from a variety of clothing manufacturers. Schoon lived in the house Pharazyn purchased for him, for the next decade.¹⁶

Arch Hill was at the time an exotic place, rapidly filling up with Polynesian immigrants who wore traditional Pacific Island costume and, according to Michael Dunn, "slaughtered pigs in their back yards." Schoon erected a trellis up over the front of the house on which he grew gourds. The inside of the house was filthy, Schoon had never learned how to take care of himself, as he had grown up with servants in the Indies. There was no furniture and Schoon would sit on the floor in a lotus-like position and play Balinese drums deep into the night, which no doubt served to emphasise his otherness. Colin

¹⁴ C. Leov-Lealand, *Barry Brickell: A Head of Steam*. Titirangi: Exisle Publishing, 1996, pp. 19 and 153.

¹⁵ Leov-Lealand, 1996, pp. 36–37.

¹⁶ Steve Rumsey, "Theo Schoon: Home Street and the lost works." *Modern New Zealand* 4, Dec. 1995[b], p. 24.

McCahon, by contrast, lived in a tidy suburban house not far away at 10 Partridge Street.¹⁷ Nearby was the old Elam School of Art, where could be found teachers like J. F. Kavanagh, A. W. S. McLaren, Lois White, W. M. Nicholson and Grant Tapper.¹⁸ No doubt a number of more adventurous students found their way to Home and Partridge Streets.

Schoon had befriended McCahon during the 1940s. A soulful photographic portrait of McCahon taken in Christchurch in 1948 (collection of the Hocken Library, Dunedin) (Fig. 23) shows McCahon at Rita Angus' house, as if distracted from his reading by the viewer, book resting on raised knee. In the background is one of McCahon's early masterpieces (painted that year) *The Virgin and Child Compared*. This friendship would last a long time. Lois McIvor recalls meeting Schoon at McCahon's Partridge Street house, Arch Hill in 1960.¹⁹

Schoon's Artistic Practice: Māori and Modernism

Interaction between the Māori and Dutch worlds began inauspiciously in 1642 when one of Abel Tasman's crew, the first European explorers of New Zealand, inadvertently gave a war challenge to a Māori iwi (tribe) in the western end of Cook Strait. One of the Dutch cockboats was rammed by a waka (canoe) and three crew killed. The explorers subsequently named the region Murderer's Bay.²⁰ Schoon is therefore part of a continuum of Māori-Dutch relations as old as the European history of New Zealand itself.

From 1956 onwards, Schoon's art became almost entirely based in Māori visual culture. He became obsessed with gourds for the greater part of his artistic output except for ink/ink and crayon on paper drawings, ink on glass drawings, linocuts and some Walters-esque koru oil paintings on hardboard in

¹⁷ Dunn, 2002, pp. 71–72.

¹⁸ *The University of New Zealand Calendar* 1961. Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1960, p. xl.

¹⁹ L. McIvor, "Remembering Colin McCahon." *Art New Zealand*, Summer 1988, pp.58-59.

²⁰ A. Sharp, *The Voyages of Abel Janzoon Tasman*. London: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 55.

1958–1959. According to Francis Pound, Schoon’s gourds do not constitute a translation of a Māori original, rather he merely copies, “producing a nostalgic fake”.²¹ The original’s “need”, in Derrida’s sense of a translator’s debt to the original,²² does not exist. This is despite Schoon’s desire for (according to Gordon Walters) “the Maori tradition to continue, and to be part of it himself.”²³ If Pound’s assertion is indeed correct, it seems a harsh assessment of what amounts to the single-handed revival of a totally extinct craft-form.

Schoon’s continued interest in modernist abstraction can be seen in the early 1960s in some of his manipulations of Māori tattoo design. The modernist discipline of simplification drawn from geometric analytical abstraction is apparent in *Forehead Moko, transformation and simplification of the early 1960s*²⁴ translated “from an elaborate forehead tattoo, to a black triangle severed by a thin white line.”²⁵ According to Skinner, the design *Varying Red and Black Filling* (Rumsey collection, Walkworth, 1960) closely resembles the original moko source in technique.²⁶ Circles (perhaps influenced by Walters’ then-new bulb forms), stylised moko and koru patterns are transferred to a modernist/Constructivist grid similar to the work of Mondrian and Moholy-Nagy to “exploit various relationships of positive and negative to create their intended effect.”²⁷ A connection can ultimately be drawn between work of this type and similar motifs in Schoon’s Bauhaus-inspired ceramics.²⁸

One drawing, *Study based on Moko* (1960, Rumsey Collection, Walkworth) plays with black squares (perhaps a distant pun on Malevich) and stylised koro forms that clearly reference Gordon Walters and Walters’ interest in Bridget Riley’s Op Art, with the transformation of positive into negative areas.²⁹ In

²¹ F. Pound, “Walters as Translator.” *Midwest*3, 1993[b], p. 36.

²² J. Derrida, “Des tours de Babel.” In J. Graham (Ed.), *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 151.

²³ Pound, 1993b, p. 36.

²⁴ In the Steve Rumsey collection of photocopies, now the property of Len Castle in Warkworth, Auckland.

²⁵ Skinner, 1996 [Thesis], p. 130–131. The image is fig. 88 and mislabelled *Varying Red and Black Filling*.

²⁶ Skinner, 1996, p. 130–131, fig. 89. Mislabelled as *New Patterns from Traditional Maori Ingredients*, 1964.

²⁷ Skinner, 1996, p. 130–131.

²⁸ S. Rumsey, 1985, p. 19 ff.

²⁹ Skinner, 1996, p. 132, fig. 92.

February of that year, the exhibition *Three Cave Artists* opened at the Auckland City Art Gallery, showing Schoon works along side those of like-minded “troglodyte” artists Ruth Coyle and Dennis Knight Turner.

Also that year he met Kees and Tina Hos, proprietors of the New Vision Gallery in Auckland, who had arrived in New Zealand four years before, and became his patrons for the next three years. Kees Hos was someone to whom Schoon could relate. He had trained at prestigious institutions in The Hague and Amsterdam, and was a Prix de Rome silver medalist (1940).³⁰ The majority of the works resulting from this highly fruitful period (mostly ink on paper and linocuts) are now held in the Rotorua Museum of Art and History. Tina and Kees Hos started New Vision as a shop in 1959, in His Majesty’s Arcade in Auckland. The gallery became an important outlet for Auckland craft-workers, who were not only paid for their work, but benefited from Kees Hos’ experience. Hos had previously lectured at the Rijksacademie in The Hague, and from 1956 to 1958 at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland.³¹

In June 1962 work by Schoon first appeared in the Department of Māori Affairs periodical *Te Ao Hou*, which published a number of his photographs of Māori whare in Rotorua, as well as an article on gourd carving, and one on gourd growing for the gardening section.³² Schoon drawings based on kowhaiwhai, mostly used as inside covers and endpieces, continued to appear in the magazine throughout the 1960s. The abstract koru and moko designs of both Schoon and Walters became part of the house style of the periodical.³³

Te Ao Hou was founded by another Dutch immigrant, Eric Schwimmer, who had lived in Indonesia. Schwimmer arrived in New Zealand in 1940, took a degree in Classics at Victoria University in Wellington, and started working at the Department of Māori Affairs. He edited *Teo Ao Hou* from 1950 to 1959.³⁴ Through *Te Ao Hou*, Schoon would have been an indirect influence on what

³⁰ P. Cape, *Prints and Printmakers in New Zealand*. Auckland: William Collins Ltd., 1974, p. 99.

³¹ S. Rumsey, 1995b, p. 24.

³² T. Schoon, “The Old Maori Water Bottles.” *Te Ao Hou* 39, June 1962, p. 39 and pp. 61–62.

³³ Pound, 1993b, p. 39, n. 21.

³⁴ J. C. Sturm, “Three Men and their Mags.” *Landfall* 185, April 1993, p. 6.

has become known as the “Tovey generation” of artists and teachers. Gordon Tovey as Supervisor of Arts and Crafts in the Department of Education would certainly have read it.

‘Something in the Air’: The Swinging 1960s

It was in 1962 that Schoon first made contact with artist Tony Fomison (1939–1990), around the time Fomison became assistant ethnologist to Duff at Canterbury Museum. Born in Christchurch, Fomison had studied sculpture at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts. While there, he also took life-drawing classes under the Prussian Expressionist Rudi Gopas. In 1973 Fomison settled in Auckland and became closely associated with the Samoan community there.

To begin with, Fomison was enthusiastic about Schoon’s work. Fomison, along with his friends Philip Clairmont (1949–1984) and Allen Maddox (1948–2000), like Schoon, must be considered outsider artists. As Schoon was drawn to both the marginalised and the avant-garde, and Fomison was interested in Polynesian and continental European art, it makes sense that they would find interest in each other. Later that year, Fomison put together an exhibition of Schoon’s rock drawings and a catalogue that was highly critical of the elder artist’s retouching of Māori petroglyphs.³⁵ It was this criticism that soured their relationship for a lengthy period of time.

The next year, Māori culture according a highly unusual privilege, displaying an open acceptance of Schoon’s methodology and practice. He was invited (as the only European or Pākehā given that honour) to participate in an exhibition of Māori artists at Turangawaewae (the seat of Kingitanga), during the Ngaruawahia Centennial. At this event, Schoon worked and exhibited along with Māori modernists Paratene Matchitt, Arnold Wilson and Selwyn Muri.³⁶ This is recorded in a photograph taken by Ans Westra showing Schoon

³⁵ T. Fomison, *Maori Rock Drawings*. (catalogue) Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington Council of Adult Education, 1962. Schoon replies in his own defence in “An Early Exploration of New Zealand Shelter Drawings”, *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter*, Vol. 5, no. 2, June 1962, pp. 116–126.

³⁶ Rumsey 1995a, p. 28.

discussing his gourd carvings with Para Matchitt.³⁷ Rangihiroa Panoho has implied that Schoon was less “Pākehā” than Walters by being “more organic, less abstracted”.³⁸ Some of Schoon’s greenstone carvings also proved popular with Māori.³⁹

Of the state of Māori visual culture in the 1960s, Schoon wrote:

Maori art today is in a terrible state of decadence, which cannot even derive a living spark from an equally dismal European artistic climate. It has been a very painful experience to see a potentially rich Maori heritage, with plenty of possibilities for new departures in contemporary trends, sink deeper into decadence and disrepute.⁴⁰

Skinner suggests that the “decadence” is the break between art and craft which Schoon hoped to correct with a transfusion Bauhaus principles,⁴¹ but it seems equally likely that Schoon saw the salvation of Māori art in its assimilation into a Western artistic tradition—his own version in particular. This is suggested in some works. The drawing *New Patterns from Traditional Maori Ingredients* dates from 1964 (Rumsey collection) and is a radical departure from the more usual Māori curvilinear forms, having more in common with the Moa Hunter rock drawings Schoon recorded as a young man, and the crescent forms of Javanese Islamic arabesques.

Mid-decade, Schoon packed up, moved out of Home Street and went to Rotorua. Over the next seven years produced a uniquely fascinating body of work. This consisted of radically modernist images of geothermal phenomena in Waiotapu, Ohinemutu and Whakarewarewa, revisiting his first ‘art’ photograph of Rotorua’s geothermal regions, taken in 1947. Schoon’s technique for these images is highly atypical for New Zealand at that time, but would have been instantly recognisable to the *Bauhäuslers* of Dessau. The photographs crop and flatten the natural landscape into abstract, two-dimensional images, freezing fleeting moments of boiling mud, steam vents, sulphurous pools and debris.

³⁷ A. Westra, “Ngaruawahia Festival of the Arts.” *Te Ao Hou* 46, March 1964, p. 28.

³⁸ Panoho, 1992, p. 195.

³⁹ Sauerbier, 1999, Tape 2, Side A, 8.20.

⁴⁰ T. Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, Rotorua, n. d., n. 14, p. 1–2. Collection of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand.

Although in 1965 the New Vision Gallery hosted a group show (opened 25 March) including Schoon, along with Alison Duff, Eric Lee Johnson, Toss Woollaston, Philip Trustrum, Nelson Thompson, Louise Henderson, Alison Pickmere (Bond), and Pete Smith, and a solo exhibition from 11–23 April. New Zealand's National Film Unit visited him in connection with his carved gourds.⁴² But these were empty achievements. Despite favourable, though conservative, reviews the solo show made no sales except for one work purchased by the gallery itself for their own stock. That year, Schoon had only one work (*One Man's Picture is another Man's Rorschach Test* 1965) displayed in the Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition *New Zealand Painting 1965*. He became depressed and considered emigrating to the United States.

The next year brought about something of a revival in Schoon's fortunes. He was invited to exhibit at the ninth annual *New Zealand Art Exhibition* in Dunedin (alongside McCahon), although with little response from critics.

Throughout the mid 1960s Schoon continued to carve gourds and photograph geothermal formations, even adding plasticine and carved pumice forms to natural structures (fig. 55), putting dyes in mud-pools and drawing on dried, cracked mud (figs. 52-55). These works seem to have close resonance with Jean Arp's biomorphic forms inspired by the microscopic organisms depicted in *Le Petit Larousse Illustré*, which also has more than a passing resonance with Schoon's Hattaway-influenced work.⁴³ It must be remembered that even by 1966, photography in New Zealand was barely accorded the distinction of being "art" and gourd carving was quite beyond the comprehension of even the most avant-garde of New Zealand critics⁴⁴—although there was some support, and again Schoon turns up in the most unlikely of periodicals: *New Zealand Gardener*.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Skinner, 1998, p. 69.

⁴² Skinner 1998, p. 69; Rumsey, 1995a, pp. 28–29. Cf. D. and P. Beatson, and R. Leonard, "Making a Scene." In M. Barr (Ed.), 1992, p. 206.

⁴³ B. Fer, *On Abstract Art*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 73–75.

⁴⁴ Dunn, 1982b, p. 22.

⁴⁵ "Art Society President Hits Out at Treatment of Gourd Artist." *New Zealand Gardener*, Sept 1966, pp. 15, 17, 19.

From Hokitika to Sydney

In 1968 Schoon made forays into pounamu carving—his own pendant designs, which he initially derived from traditional Māori pekapeka, and later, koru and traditional fishhook motifs. This brought work with the Westland Greenstone Company's Hokitika factory in 1969. On the way to Hokitika via Christchurch, Schoon made the acquaintance of Hettie Sawyers, also born in Java, the founder of "Hettie's Rock Shop".

During his period in New Zealand's West Coast, Schoon's typical eccentric behaviour made him highly unpopular with the locals. This caused him to become close friends with the painter-ceramicist Yvonne Rust. Both shared a belief in the use of local clays over importing clay from Britain, and both were considered somewhat eccentric by their neighbours.⁴⁶

In 1970 Schoon exhibited some greenstone artefacts in a jewellery exhibition at the New Vision Gallery. Some of his geothermal photographs were exhibited in the New Zealand Pavilion at Expo 1970 in Tokyo. Supported by the New Zealand Design Council, Schoon received an Arts Council Grant for "jade research" in Hong Kong over October and November. On the way, he visited Japan and Bali, but there is little evidence to suggest he conducted any research. The Westland Greenstone Company fired Schoon on his departure because he consistently refused to carve reproduction hei-tiki for the tourist market, preferring instead to make original works of pounamu art. Two years later, Hettie Sawyers was locating buyers for Schoon's greenstone collection. With the help of this money he crossed the Tasman Sea to live in Sydney, Australia, in the belief that artists were more highly valued in that country than New Zealand.⁴⁷ At this time he wrote, "My work survives only because of an export market. Its destiny is nil and nowhere when it depends on a local public and market."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Warren Feeney (Director of the Centre of contemporary Art (CoCA), Christchurch), conversation with author, 25 Feb 2002.

⁴⁷ Rumsey 1995a, p. 30.

⁴⁸ T. Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 4 June 1970. Possession of M. Dunn.

He had good reason to believe that Australia might be more welcoming of his vision. He already had a toe-hold in the form of what Robert Hughes has described as “one of the few significant statements made in Australian art in the early sixties.”⁴⁹ During the 1950s, Schoon had mentored the artist Ross Crothall (born New Zealand, 1934 - ?). Crothall later moved to Sydney, and in 1961 helped found the Annandale Imitation Realists with Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley.⁵⁰ The group (named for the suburb of Sydney where Crothall’s studio was located) displayed a number of Schoonian influences, particularly an interest in humorous assemblage and *objets trouvés*. While their interest in Jean Dubuffet is usually traced to Lanceley’s teacher John Olsen, it is tempting to think Schoon would have approved.⁵¹

Leonora Howlett was a member of the Imitation Realists, and for a time married to Colin Lanceley. She describes Schoon as “a distinct presence by word of mouth in our lives in the late 50s and early 60s through the medium of Ross Crothall.”⁵²

Ross, who was significantly older than us, brought with him many new influences, and one was the almost mythical Theo Schoon. Ross carried with him a most beautiful piece of pottery by Theo, an elegant simple piece of earthenware of grainy texture, matt glaze and with a slightly raised band about three quarters of the way towards the top. It made quite an impression as a contrast to the most interesting pottery being made in Australia at the time which was being made by the Boyds⁵³ who used very heavy decorative glazes and motifs. Ross carried it around with him to all the many places he lived in – in the manner that someone might carry a prayer rug ...⁵⁴

Howlett recalls Crothall’s passion for Māori art, inherited from Schoon. Schoon does not seem to have communicated with any surviving members of the Imitation Realists when he moved to Sydney.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ R. Hughes, *The Art of Australia*. Hammonds Worth: Pelican (Penguin), 1970, p. 307.

⁵⁰ S. Gardner, “A Century of New Zealand Artists in Australia.” Online. Available <http://www.vortavortex.net/leaping.html>, p. 4.

⁵¹ “Annandale Imitation Realists.” Grove Dictionary of Art Online. Available <http://www.artnet.com/library/00/0030/T003082.ASP>

“Lanceley, Colin.” Grove Dictionary of Art Online. Available <http://www.artnet.com/library/04/0489/T048957.asp>

⁵² Leonora Howlett, email to author, 26 May 2003.

⁵³ David Boyd, brother of the painter Arthur Boyd. Together with Dr Bernard Smith, he started the Antipodean Group in Melbourne in 1959

⁵⁴ Howlett, 2003.

⁵⁵ Howlett, 2003.

Mike Brown wrote positively about Schoon's influence on Crothall:

Probably there was no Sydney equivalent to Theo Schoon, Crothall's main mentor, who, despite his Bauhaus links, had put modernism on the back burner, where he believed it belonged, to devote his life to the study and analysis of Māori Art.⁵⁶

Schoon's example, as passed on by Crothall, inspired Brown to explore non-European art forms, which became an important factor in his art.⁵⁷

Along with Gordon Walters, Schoon had also been an influence on George Henry Johnson (born Nelson, New Zealand, 1926) in late 1940s Wellington. Schoon lived with him and his brother, the poet Louis Johnson (1924-88), in a "flatette" in Allenby Terrace, Wellington, briefly in 1947-8. This became the nexus for the "Wellington group" that included Walters and musician-poet Keith Jacobs.⁵⁸

After arriving in Australia in 1951, Johnson became an associate of Roger Kemp and Leonard French. His first exhibition at the Tasmanian Tourist Bureau Gallery, Melbourne, in 1956, established his reputation as Australia's leading radical abstractionist.⁵⁹ He wrote:

Theo's influence on Gordon [Walters] and myself I'd say was considerable and mainly through use of language and philosophical approach, an Artist in the best sense of the word, one who could change others through the use of words alone was a great gift...

NZ was at a great disadvantage for never having realised it had a "GENIUS" in its midst, running around those hills, climbing and scuttling into caves recording the history of a country and in the meanwhile inspiring the young. Here then is someone who in my opinion should in turn be recorded and placed high in the story of NZ art.⁶⁰

In December 1972, Schoon's geothermal photographs were published in *Australian Photography*.⁶¹ This document is "a major presentation of Schoon's

⁵⁶ M. Brown, "Kite II: Part 1: what on earth are you saying, Colin?" *Art Monthly Australia*, Sept 1994, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Brown, 1994, p. 6.

⁵⁸ George Johnson, Tootgarook, Victoria, Australia, letter to author, 8 July 2003. Collection of A. P. Wood, p. 1-2.

⁵⁹ "Johnson, George Henry" Grove Dictionary of Art Online. Available <http://www.artnet.com/library/04/0450/T045016.asp>

⁶⁰ Johnson p.4-7.

⁶¹ T. Schoon, "Pictures by a Caveman." *Australian Photography*, Dec 1972, p. 42.

personal narrative of change.”⁶² This was very much part of the continuum begun by his experience documenting Māori rock drawings in the South Island, as a new aesthetic for “viewing” art:

While on this project, I became interested in Natural designs, patterns and abstract forms ... especially in small things, not tremendous landscapes. I began to escape from the whole European tradition of painting, and to develop a fresh new vision ... a new visual freedom.⁶³

Schoon presented his geothermal photographs very much as a product of the camera. “There is no other medium than the camera, which can record such wonders so well and so lovingly, in all their richness, subtlety and detail.”⁶⁴ He saw in the images “created” by geothermal activity a strong resemblance to modernist abstract art.

I found this particularly amusing whenever I thought of the discomfort of New Zealanders in the presence of abstract art. Here at least they can’t splutter and waffle: nature is a modern artist.⁶⁵

Comparisons can be drawn between Schoon’s approach to geothermal photography and Paul Klee’s metaphor of applying a microscope to nature in order to perceive the underlying basic structures.⁶⁶

Schoon also relied on the thorough design training he received in Rotterdam as an aesthetic benchmark.

Schoon: My sense of design is a factor of judgement. My whole education in design said, Hey this is good, hey this is powerful, this is strong, this is significant. It has been a guide to me in judgement all the time. That’s what it did.

Martin Rumsby: You didn’t try to impose a design onto...

Schoon: No, only in recognising when things were good.⁶⁷

Schoon also saw geothermal formations as a visual resource, “nature’s super abstract (concrete) art. An artist’s visual diary.”⁶⁸ He encouraged several other

⁶² D. Skinner, *Off The Beaten Track: modernism in Rotorua*. Rotorua: Rotorua Museum of Art & History, 2000, p.19.

⁶³ Schoon, 1972, p. 42.

⁶⁴ Schoon, 1972, p. 44.

⁶⁵ G. Rosenberg and T. Schoon, unpublished essay, p. 3a. Te Papa Tongarewa museum of New Zealand collection, Wellington.

⁶⁶ Skinner, 2000, p. 20. Cf. P. Klee, *On Modern Art*. London: Faber & Faber, 1969, p. 93.

⁶⁷ T. Schoon, transcript of interview with Martin Rumsby, 30 Sept 1982, p. 2. Rotorua Museum Collection.

artists to turn to these phenomena for inspiration, including the Dutch immigrant artists Willem Bakkenes (who settled in Rotorua) and photographer Ans Westra.

Also in 1972, Petar Vuletic opened a dealer gallery on the corner of O'Connell and Shortland Streets, Auckland – a sign that a certain American-influenced artistic mentality had established itself in New Zealand. Vuletic was a devotee of abstract formalism in the manner favoured by Clement Greenberg, and fiercely opposed to the Nationalist tendencies of much New Zealand art. His stable of artists from 1972 to 1976 included Stephen Bambury, Roy Good, Richard Killeen, Ron Left, Milan Mrkusich, Philip O'Sullivan, Ian Scott, Geoff Thornley and Alan Wright.⁶⁹ Vuletic accorded both Schoon and Walters the first survey exhibitions of their 1950s work.⁷⁰

Schoon's only book – despite being a prolific writer - was published in Sydney in 1963. *Jade Country*⁷¹ is an unusual combination of anecdote, local description and fascinating information on the history of pounamu carving and the contemporary commercial greenstone business. He was persuaded to write this text by the Australian Jade Arts group. The book offers little about Schoon's life on the West Coast, and the photographs are purely documentary, lacking his dramatic cropping and flattening style.⁷²

Schoon's mother died in Amsterdam in 1975. On his inheritance from her will, he made several return trips to Bali, sponsoring Balinese dancers and spending time in an Indonesian prison after offending the authorities in an unspecified manner. Perhaps this confirmed for him that 'his' Bali no longer existed, and like the Sydney-born artist Donald Friend (1925-1989) before him, who had lived in Bali 1967-1975, disillusioned, he returned to Australia.

⁶⁸ T. Schoon, letter to Luit Bieringa, undated, p. 1. Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand collection, Wellington.

⁶⁹ Cf. the exhibition *Vuletic and His Circle*, curated by Edward Hanfling and Alan Wright, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland, 10 May–28 June 2003.

⁷⁰ F. Pound, "The Words and the Art: New Zealand Art Criticism c.1950–c.1990." In Barr, 1992, p. 193.

⁷¹ Cloth bound, 143pp, 65 illustrations in colour and black and white.

⁷² T. Schoon, *Jade Country*. Sydney: Jade Arts, 1973.

The 1980s marked a slight increase in interest in Schoon's work. In 1981, Ron Brownson, Senior Curator of New Zealand and Pacific art at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki spent a week with him in West Kempsey, New South Wales, acquiring negatives, transparencies and photographic prints for the Gallery's permanent collection. During an exhibition in 1982 at the Rotorua Bathhouse Museum: *Theo Schoon: Collected Works* (21 June to 18 July), for which the artist had returned, Schoon and Fomison reconciled their differences.

Also in that year, Schoon painted a relatively ordinary academic nude. (fig. 56) The painting is a well modelled, though loosely executed, oil study of a reclining female nude in earthy tones. Measuring 50 cm by 83 cm, it was first exhibited at the Marshall Seifert Gallery in Dunedin in November of that year.⁷³ Even then, it was clear that his skill had not diminished.

For nine months in 1983 Schoon squatted with John Perry (Director of the Rotorua Museum and Art Gallery) in the Astral doctors' rooms in Tutanekai Street, Rotorua. There they lived off fast food and stockpots. Schoon kept audience like a king with a court, playing recordings of Balinese music late into the night and showing slides of Indonesia to enraptured visitors. His health, however, was badly affected during this relatively happy time. Fumes from the dry cleaners' downstairs from where the two squatted, in Perry's words "nearly killed him [Schoon]". His emphysema was already badly aggravated by his habit of chain-smoking Camel cigarettes.⁷⁴

Schoon returned to Australia a few months before his death. He felt neglected in New Zealand, although the Bathhouse Museum in Rotorua was exhibiting his work, and Peter Waaka (born and bred in Whakarewarewa, Rotorua) had written an article on Schoon for the *New Zealand Listener*.⁷⁵ Even in his last years in New Zealand, 1982-1985, dogged by ill health made worse by heavy smoking, and assorted financial troubles, Schoon was still productive—a television programme, directed by Kathy Findley for TVNZ's *Kaleidoscope*

⁷³ A. L. Grigoriev, "Webb's Auction No. 246, 25 June 2002." *NZ Art Monthly*, July 2002; *Webb's Catalogue*, Lot 109, p. 92, 25–27 June 2002.

⁷⁴ Perry, 2002.

⁷⁵ P. Waaka, "The Grand Pattern of Life." *New Zealand Listener*, 31 July 1982.

series, was made about his work on the Waiotapu geothermal region. He cultivated Peruvian gourds, designed a mural for the Rotorua Post Office, and carved stamps for embossing ceramics (developed with Len Castle).⁷⁶ Essentially Schoon resorted to making these stamps because his illness left him too weak to do anything else.⁷⁷

A year before his death, Helen Leach in her book *A Thousand Years of Gardening in New Zealand* (1984) included an illustration of a Schoon-carved gourd, and described him as having “inspired renewed interest in gourd carving in recent years”.⁷⁸ The pattern shown combines the wandering line of Kandinsky and the organic forms of Abstract Surrealism with the filling patterns inspired by Māori whakairo (wood-carving). Yet even this kind of acceptance of his work was insufficient to mollify him. Letters written to the artist Malcolm Ross by Schoon in 1984 clearly indicate the extent of his defensive bitterness toward his adopted.

No matter how much you choose to differ with my opinions or pronouncements, my Ego doesn't depend on being right or correct in the eyes of other people. They may live with their visions, taboos, sentiments or what have you. That's their problem.

I try only to be as honest and sincere as I can be, after the research, the study and the observations I have made. I must live up to what I have seen and learned, and if this doesn't sit well with Kiwis, that's too bad.⁷⁹

Schoon was not the only Anglo-Celtic European genius to be treated so in New Zealand. Rudi Gopas, and the Austrians architect Ernst Plischke (1903-92) and philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994) had similar experiences. Clearly Schoon never identified as a “Kiwi”. He employed his sense of alienation as a creative

⁷⁶ G. Rosenberg and H. Mason, “Theo Schoon: 1915-1985.” *NZ Crafter* 15, Summer 1985, p. 8. Certainly Schoon’s experience of the ceramic arts of Bali well qualified him. Schoon’s clay stamps may have originated in the patterns incised with sharp bamboo sticks and fingers of Bali. However, stamped clay decoration of ceramics can be found on the Indonesian island of Lombok – a short boat ride from Bali. (A. Richter, *Arts and Crafts of Indonesia*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, p. 46 and p. 51, pl. 34.) Of the three copy sets of stamps (over a hundred stamps each), one was given to New Zealand ceramicist Steven Scholefield, a student of Schoon’s in the 1980s, who still uses them. (“Steven Scholefield, Rocket Pottery.” Online. Available <http://www.himatangi-beach.gen.nz/Facilities/Arts/RocketPottery/RocketPottery.htm>)

⁷⁷ Castle interview, 2002.

⁷⁸ H. Leach, *A Thousand Years of Gardening in New Zealand*. Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd., 1984, p. 66.

⁷⁹ Schoon to Ross, 1984, p. 1.

tool and a way of distancing himself from New Zealand art education and practice:

I am a mixture of warmth and affection, and a stone cold realism, the child's unconfused eye, the artist's trained eye.

I haven't been conditioned by your school, museums and fuckwit teachers, and all the no nos of Kiwi society, and alas I have had fierce battles with my own Dutch upbringing, with its own set of frauds. So on the whole I have become critical by habit, contemptuous of Continental or Kiwi superstitions, the garbage that our intellectuals and teachers failed to put outside for the dustman.⁸⁰

This is the voice of bitter disillusionment, not entirely dissimilar from that of McCahon.

In 1985, Schoon entered a facility for the elderly in Mangere, as he was no longer able to take care of himself. Inevitably, he resented the restrictions imposed on him. Len Castle briefly took him into his home for a while, but his situation in New Zealand finally became intolerable when he was informed that the Australian pension he had been living on, would be stopped unless he returned to live in Australia.⁸¹

From Sydney, he wrote in a letter:

I am living with a French-Canadian writer I have known a long time who lives close to the centre of the city. It is a set-up where I can function again.⁸²

The identity of his French-Canadian friend is not known.

For a time Schoon enjoyed Sydney's cosmopolitan environment with better availability of books, magazines, delicatessens, information networks of all kinds and people, but at last, true to his cantankerous self, he fell out with his housemate and finally entered the Randwick boarding-house shortly before his death.

Thus ended the life of one of the most important and least acknowledged figures in twentieth century New Zealand art, departing as much an outsider and unconsidered master as he arrived.

⁸⁰ Schoon to Ross, 1984, p. 1.

⁸¹ Rosenberg and Mason, 1985, p. 8.

⁸² Rosenberg and Mason, 1985, p. 8.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Schoon's pervasive influence over post-war modernist art in New Zealand is easily explained. He arrived in the dominion with the authority of his European-ness. He was, for New Zealand's artists, a way to reconstruct a modernist cultural practice that already existed in Europe, from the few fragments that trickled this far south. He had known the developments of modernist practice first hand and had been trained in the direct tradition of the Dutch old masters by professional European teachers. He was also a liberating, exotic presence in the otherwise staid milieu of Dominion-era New Zealand. It would be only natural for the young bohemians of the almost still-born New Zealand avant-garde to seek him out for guidance.

In more objective terms, few individuals can be said to have made as much impact, or brought as much knowledge and new vision to New Zealand art. Certainly only van der Velden, among most artists in New Zealand art history, can be said to have had as much direct contact with the European avant-garde between the 1880s and 1940s.

Despite having mentored many prominent artists of the New Zealand canon over three decades and being one of the first Europeans to introduce Māori visual culture into the national artistic discourse, he has been largely ignored except as an appendix to the life and careers of Gordon Walters and, to a lesser extent, Rita Angus. This seems to be due to two factors. Firstly his own difficult personality and "outsider" status placed him too far beyond the mainstream concerns of art practice in New Zealand at the time. Secondly, the relative insularity of the New Zealand art scene tended to make constant reference to London (except for rare instances: van der Velden, Nerli and Gopas). Because Schoon existed outside the context of that Anglo-Celtic culture, he tended to be ignored by the discourse of an art establishment still based in the academic figure study and romantic pseudo-impressionistic landscape. The younger generation that did appreciate what Schoon offered, had yet to make themselves heard. By the time they had taken up their

positions in the arts community, Schoon had been passed by as the one-time champion of an outmoded ultra-modernism, to become the eccentric carver of quaint gourds. Being perceived as having Māori associations further marginalised him, while at the same time European modernism was becoming more widely understood. By that time, a younger generation of artists considered his knowledge somewhat obsolete.

He was the first European artist to recognise the national importance of Māori visual culture, and the need to recognise it in modern New Zealand art.

Schoon's life and work offers the possibility of a twentieth century art history, specifically relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, that existed alongside and independently of the more widely accepted Euro-American Paris and New York-centred tradition.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig.

1. *Theo Schoon as a Young Man* (c.1940s)
2. *Theo Schoon* (c.1960s)
3. Jill Carlyle, *Theo Schoon* (1985)
4. Theo Schoon, *One Man's Picture is Another Man's Rorsharch* [sic] *Test* (1964)
5. Map of Central Java
6. Piet Zwart, *Rotterdam* (c.1928)
7. Theo Schoon, *Untitled (Stones)* (1950)
8. Theo Schoon, *Done Up in Pins and Curlers* (c.1965)
9. Theo Schoon, *Manchu Diadem* (c.1965)
10. Theo Schoon, *Buddha, Chadai Mendut, Java* (c.1938)
11. Spencer Digby, *Theo Schoon as a Javanese Dancer* (1944)
12. Theo Schoon, *Untitled Self Portrait* (c.1941-42)
13. Theo Schoon, *Self Portrait with Balinese Mask* (1976)
14. Theo Schoon, *Self Portrait* (1976)
15. Theo Schoon, *Balinese Dancer* (c.1938?)
16. Auke Sonnegga, *Untitled* (c.1938)
17. Miguel Covarrubias, *Untitled* (c.1930)
18. Rita Angus, *Theo Schoon* (1942)
19. Theo Schoon, *Rita Angus* (c.1942)
20. Theo Schoon, *Rita Angus* (1947)
21. Theo Schoon, *Dennis Knight Turner* (c.1944)
22. Theo Schoon, *Portrait of James K. Baxter as a Young Man* (1948)

23. Theo Schoon, *Colin McCahon* (1948)
24. Alison Pickmere, *Portrait of Theo Schoon* (1949)
25. Theo Schoon, *High Society* (1948)
26. Theo Schoon, *Five O'clock* (1948)
27. Theo Schoon, *Untitled Drawing* (1964)
28. Theo Schoon, *Untitled Drawing* (1963)
- 29-33. Theo Schoon, *Untitled Abstract Drawings after Rolfe Hattaway*
34. Rolfe Hattaway, *Untitled Drawing* (1949)
35. Rolfe Hattaway, *Untitled Drawing* (1949)
- 36-41. Theo Schoon, Reproductions of Maori Rock Drawings
42. Theo Schoon, *Untitled Drawing* (1963)
43. Theo Schoon, *Manaia Forms* (1965)
44. Gordon Walters, *Koru* (c.1960)
45. Theo Schoon, *Tirikatene* (1960)
46. Theo Schoon, *Untitled (Polynesian Abstract)* (1965)
47. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (1963)
48. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (1964)
49. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (photograph of carved gourds) (c.1967)
50. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (designs for pounamu) (c.1971)
51. Theo Schoon, *Untitled (Kowhaiwhai Patterns)* (c.1957)
52. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (mudpool photograph)
53. Theo Schoon, *Silica-Coated and Fossilised Debris, Waiotapu* (c.1968)
54. Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (geothermal photograph) (c.1965)
55. Theo Schoon, *Mud Pool Photograph with Carved Mask*
56. Theo Schoon, *Reclining Nude* (1982)

57. Theo Schoon, *Whakare Warewa, Rororua* (c.1965)
58. Len Castle, Stoneware Vase after a design by Theo Schoon
59. Len Castle, Stoneware Bowl decorated by Theo Schoon
60. Steve Rumsey, kiln firing at Barry Brickell's house
Tui Street, Auckland (1957)



Fig.1

Schoon as a Young Man (c.1940s), b/w photograph. Collection of Peter Saubier.



Fig. 2

Theo Schoon (c.1960s), b/w photograph. Collection of Peter Saubier.

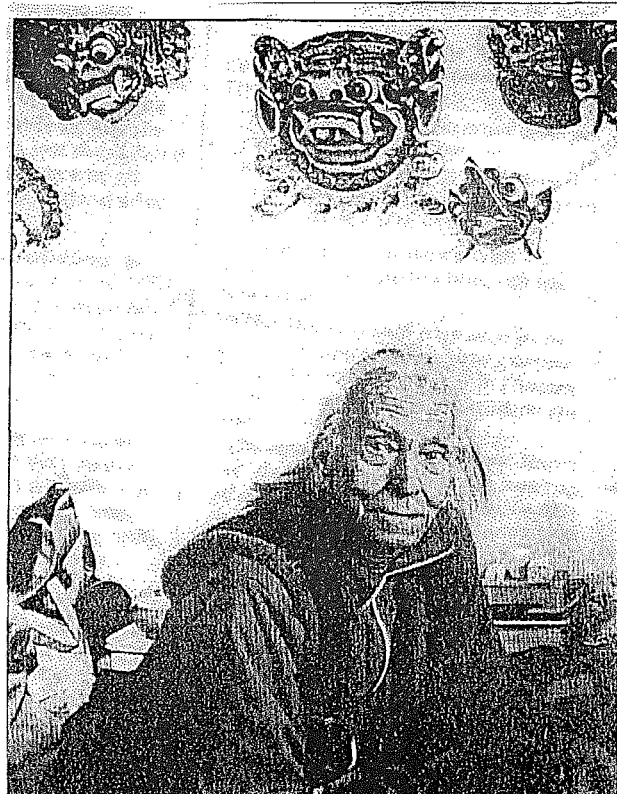


Fig.3

Jill Carlyle, *Theo Schoon* (1985). Details unknown.

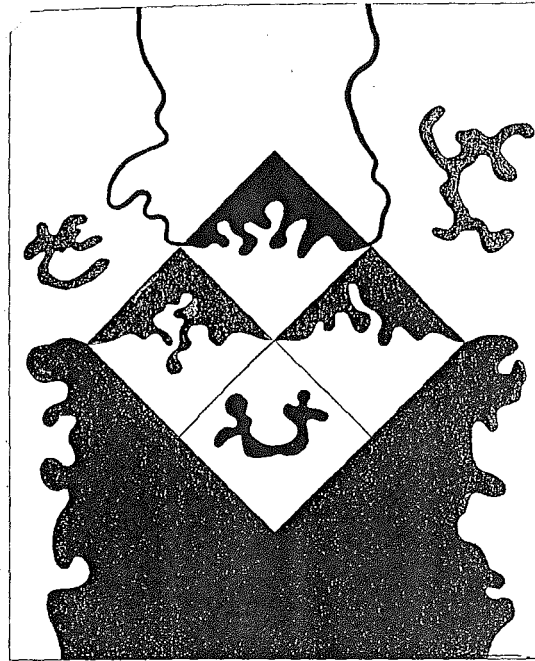


Fig.4 Theo Schoon, *One Man's Picture is Another Man's Rorschach [sic] Test* (1964), p.v.a. on board, 147x122cm. Collection of Jenny Gibbs, Auckland.



Fig.5 Map of Central Java.

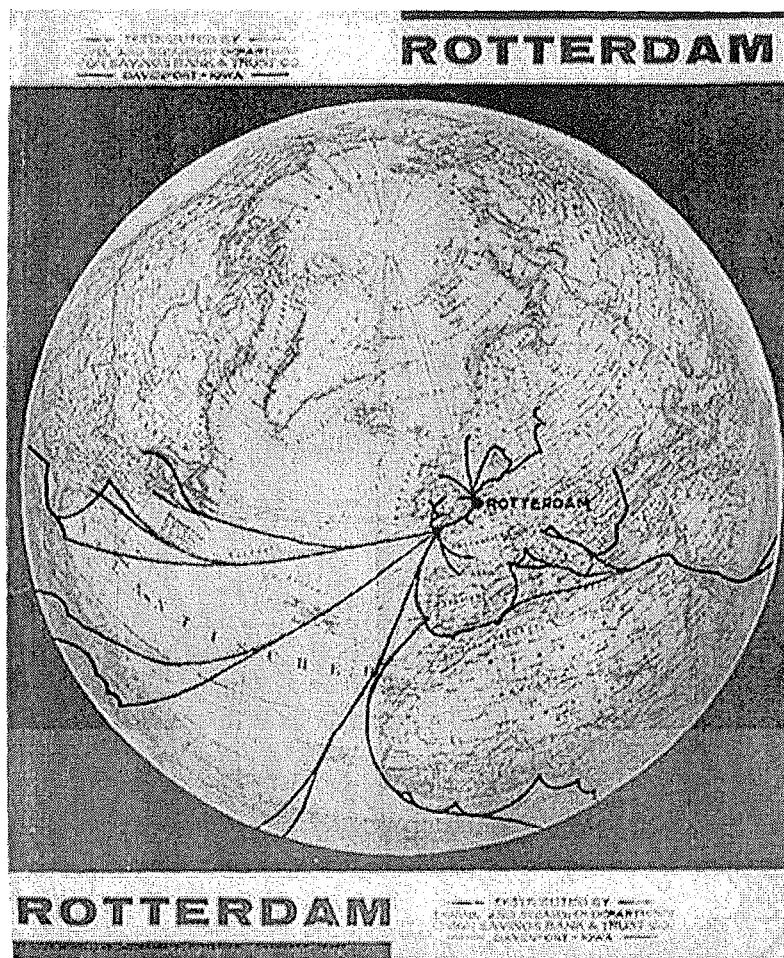


Fig.6 Piet Zwart, *Rotterdam* (c.1928) front cover. Collection of David Levine, USA.

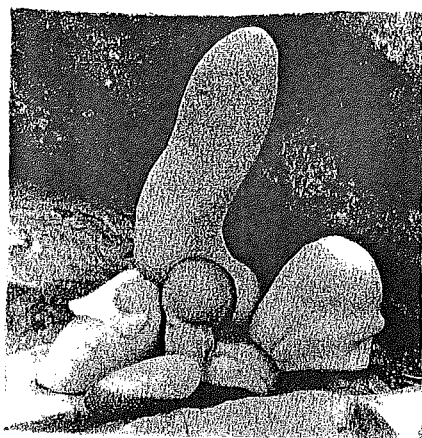


Fig. 7 Theo Schoon, *Untitled (Stones)* (1950)

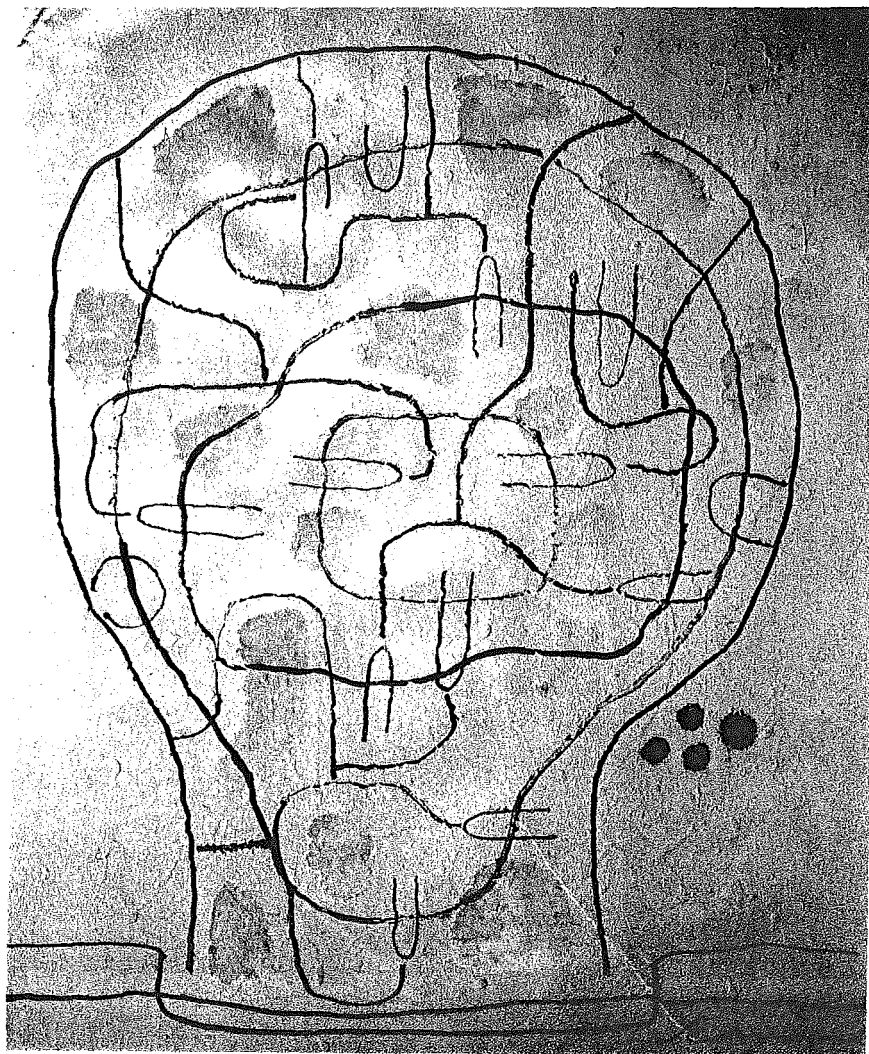


Fig.8

Theo Schoon, *Done up in Pins and Curls* (c.1965), oil on paper, 61x48cm. Paris Family Collection, Wellington.

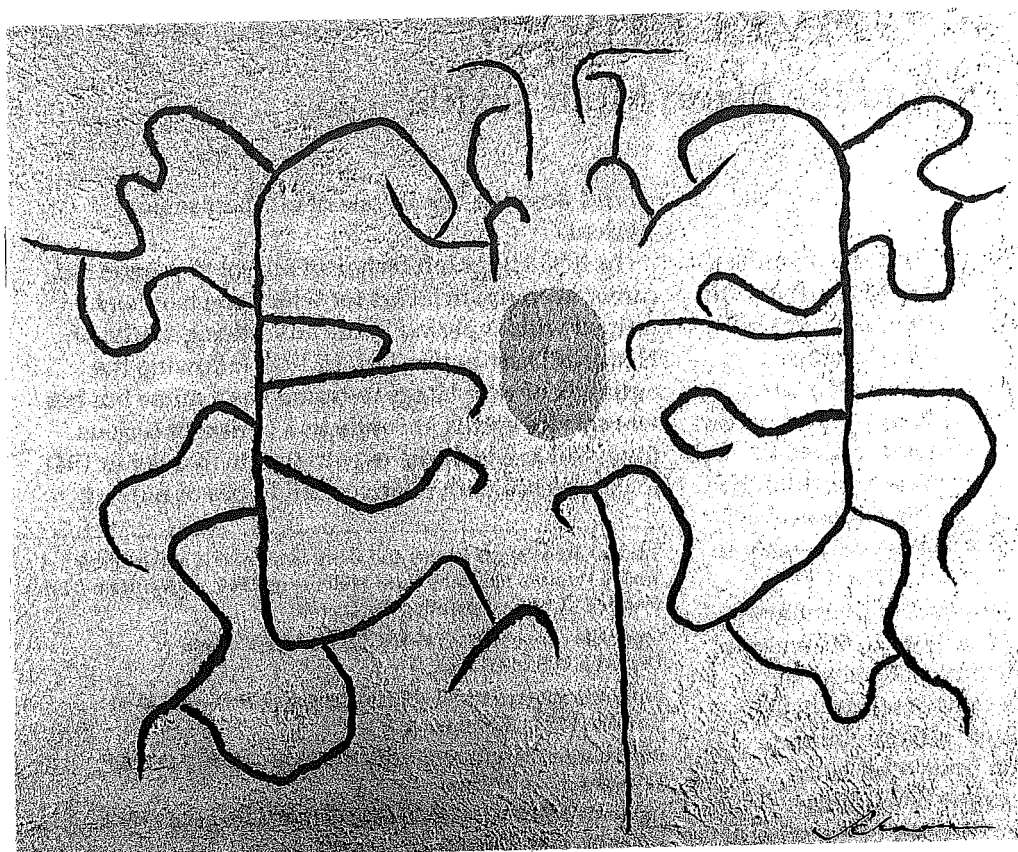


Fig.9

Theo Schoon, *Manchu Diadem* (c.1965), oil on hardboard, 77.7x96.4 cm. Fletcher Challenge Collection.



Fig.10

Theo Schoon, *Buddha, Chandai Mendut, Java.* (c.1938), b/w photograph. Collection of Michael Dunn, Auckland.

Fig.11

Spencer Digby, *Theo Schoon as a Javanese Dancer* (1944), b/w photograph, dimensions unknown, reproduced in *The Arts in New Zealand* Dec. 1944-Jan. 1945, p.42.



Fig.12

Theo Schoon, untitled self-portrait (c.1941-1942), b/w photograph, 25.5x20cm. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.



Fig.13 Theo Schoon, *Self-Portrait with Balinese Mask* (1976), colour photograph, 8x10cm. Schoon Estate, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.



Fig.14 Theo Schoon, *Self Portrait* (1976), photographic transparency. Schoon Estate, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.



Fig.15

Theo Schoon, *Balinese Dancer* (c.1938?), details unknown. From a photograph in the collection of Peter Saubier.



Fig.16

Auke Sonnega, untitled painting (c.1938), details unknown. Collection of M. Rogge, Netherlands.



Fig.17

Miguel Covarrubias, untitled study (c.1930), details unknown.

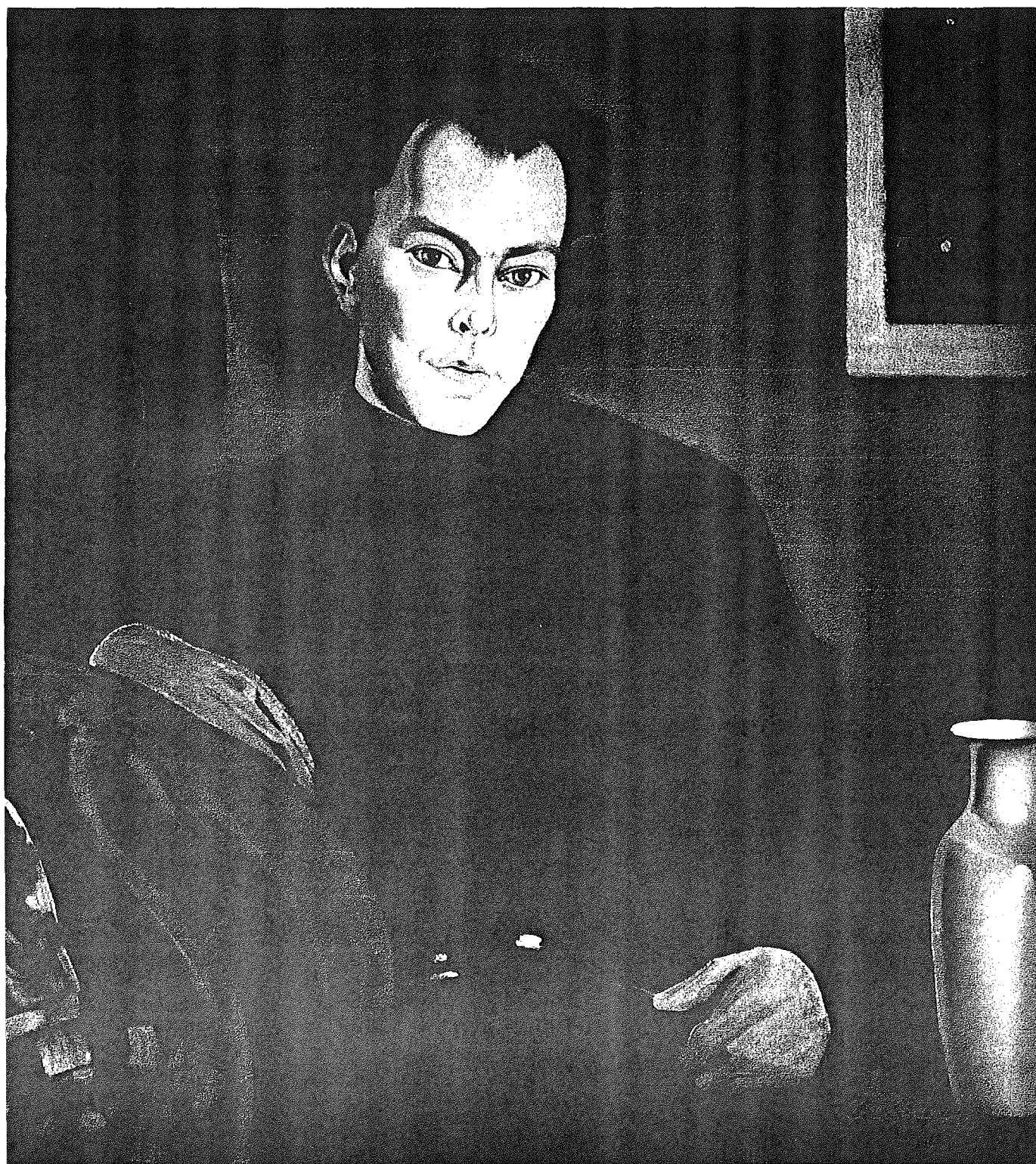


Fig.18 Rita Angus, *Theo Schoon* (1942), oil on board, dimensions unknown. Collection of Anna-Maria Hertzner, USA.

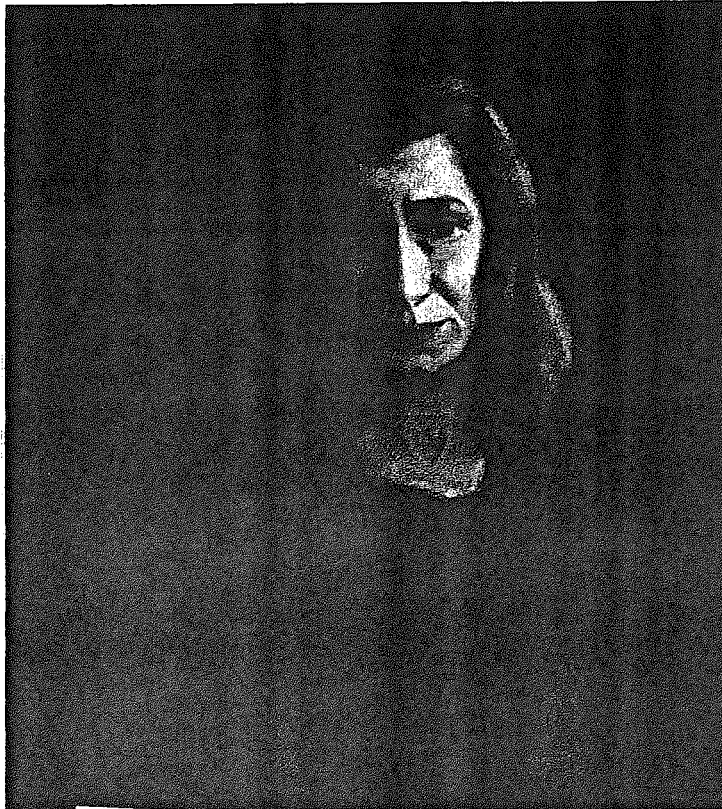


Fig.19 Theo Schoon, *Rita Angus* (c.1942), oil on board, dimensions unknown. Private Collection, Christchurch.



Fig.20 Theo Schoon, *Rita Angus* (1947), b/w photograph. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

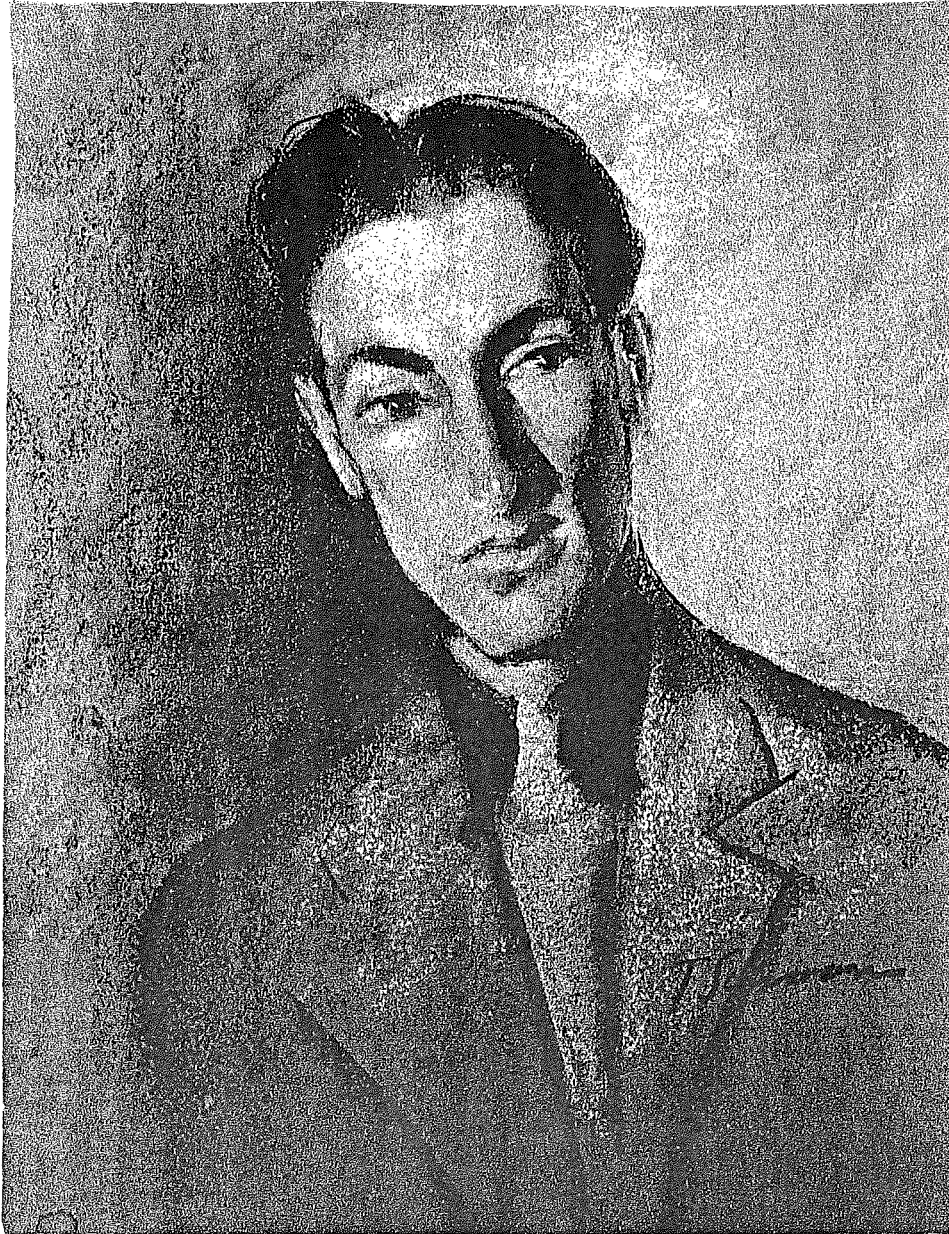


Fig.21 Theo Schoon, *Dennis Knight Turner* (c.1944), pastel on paper, 62.5x48.5cm. Rotorua Art Gallery. Purchased in Auckland with generous assistance from Mr Terry Thornton & Mr John Goss.



Fig.22

Theo Schoon, *Portrait of James K. Baxter as a Young Man* (1948), oil on board, signed and dated, 63x52.5cm. Private Collection.

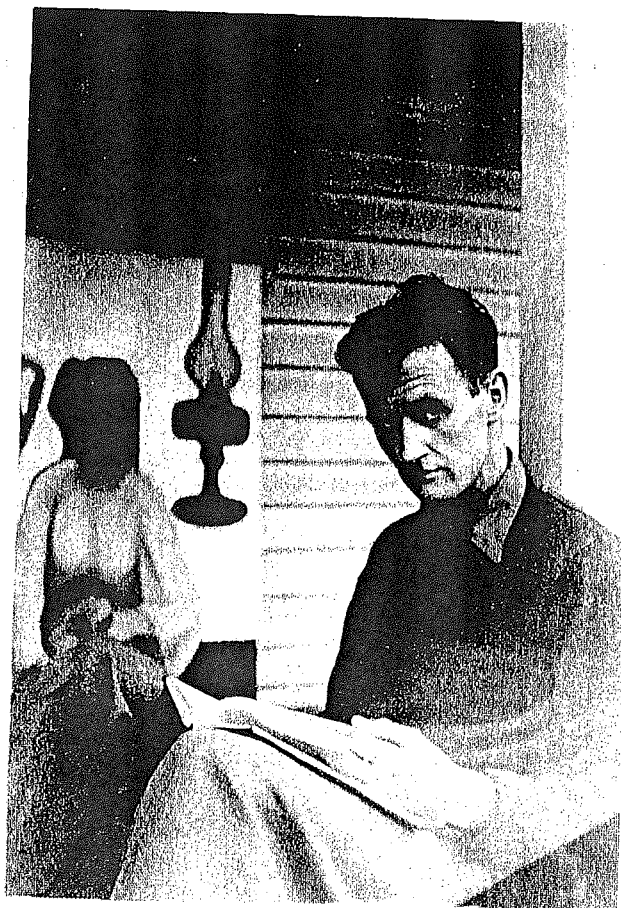


Fig.23

Theo Schoon, *Colin McCahon* (1948),
Collection of the Hocken Library, Dunedin.



Fig.24

Alison Pickmere, *Portrait of Theo Schoon* (1949),
published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*,
No.5., p. 78.



Cartoon, "High Society," by Theo Schoon.

Fig.25 Theo Schoon, *High Society* (1948), published in *Art in New Zealand* 57, p.28.

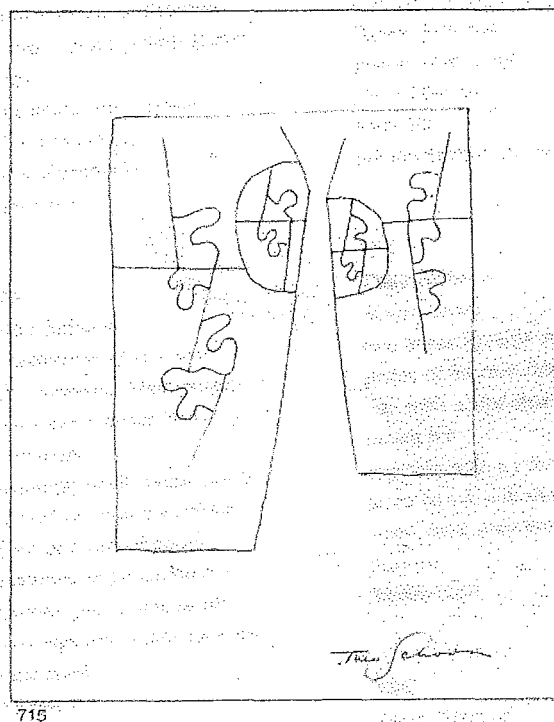


Cartoon, "Five O'clock" Theo Schoon

Fig.26 Theo Schoon, *Five O'clock* (1948), published in *Art in New Zealand* 57, p.29.

Fig.27

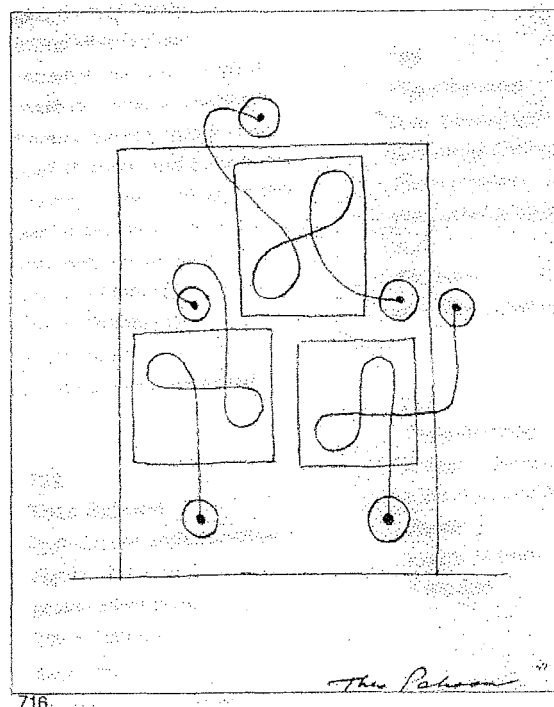
Theo Schoon, untitled (1964), ink on paper,
20.5x17.2cm



715

Fig.28

Theo Schoon, untitled (1963), ink on paper,
28.5x22.0cm.



716

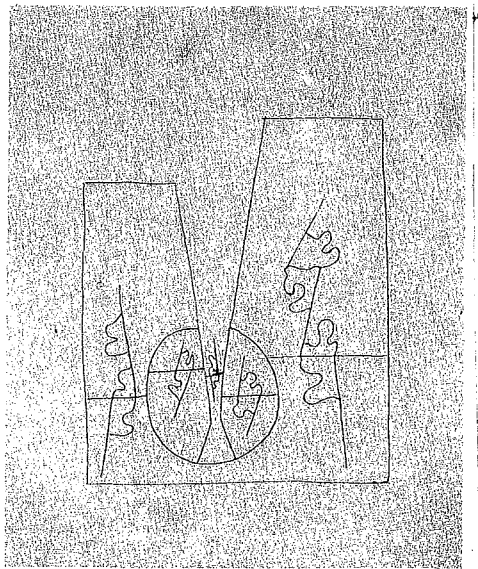


Fig.29

Theo Schoon, untitled abstract drawing after Rolfe Hattaway. Collection of Peter Sauerbier.

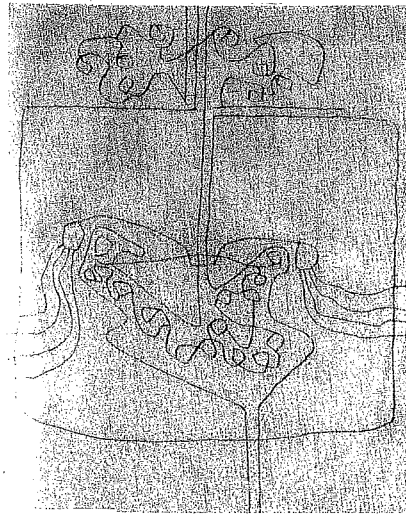


Fig.31

Theo Schoon, untitled abstract drawing after Rolfe Hattaway. Collection of Peter Sauerbier.

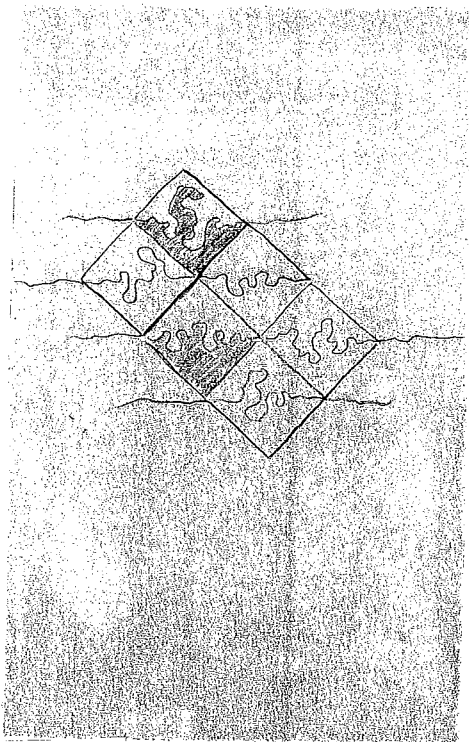


Fig.30

Theo Schoon, untitled abstract drawing after Rolfe Hattaway. Collection of Peter Sauerbier.

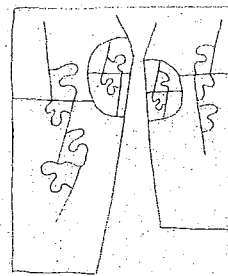


Fig.32

Theo Schoon, untitled abstract drawing after Rolfe Hattaway. Collection of Peter Sauerbier.

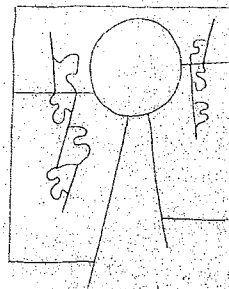


Fig.33

Theo Schoon, untitled abstract drawing after Rolfe Hattaway. Collection of Peter Sauerbier.



Fig.34 Rolfe Hattaway, untitled (1949), pencil on paper, 27x37cm.

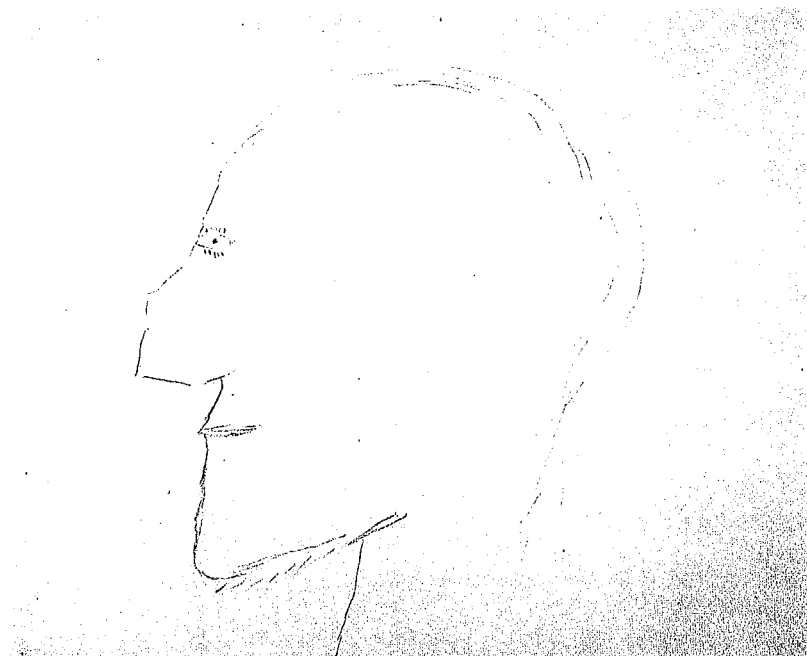


Fig.35 Rolfe Hattaway, untitled (1949), pencil on paper, 27x37cm.

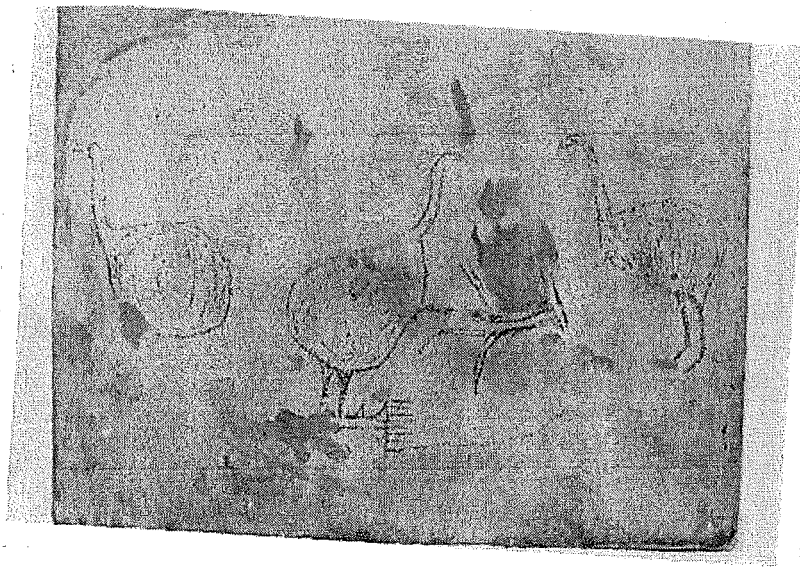


Fig.36

Theo Schoon, Copy of Maori Rock Drawing,
Craigmore, South Island (S110.1).
Collection of Canterbury Museum.

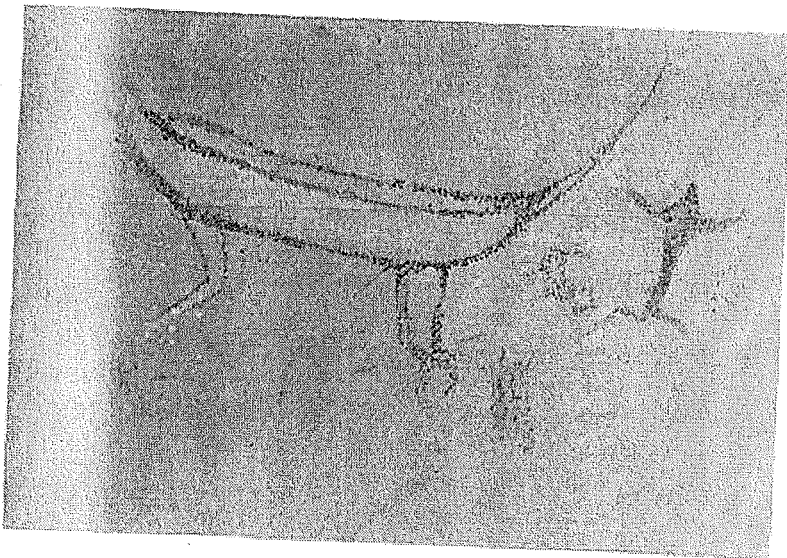


Fig.37

Theo Schoon, Copy of Maori Rock Drawing,
Craigmore, South Island (S110.2).
Collection of Canterbury Museum.

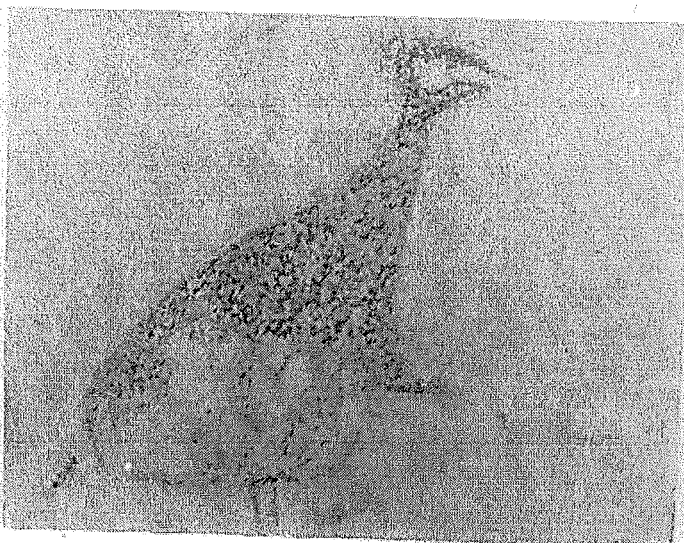


Fig.38

Theo Schoon, Copy of Maori Rock Drawing,
Craigmore, South Island (S110.3).
Collection of Canterbury Museum.

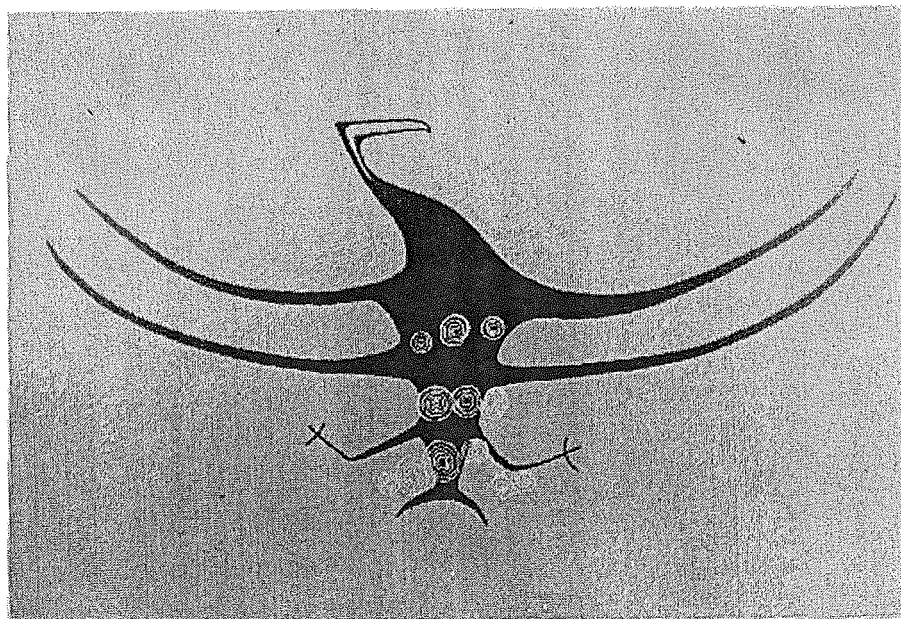


Fig.39

Theo Schoon, Copy of Maori Rock Drawing
Francis Farm, Earthquakes,
South Island (S127.16)
Collection of Canterbury Museum

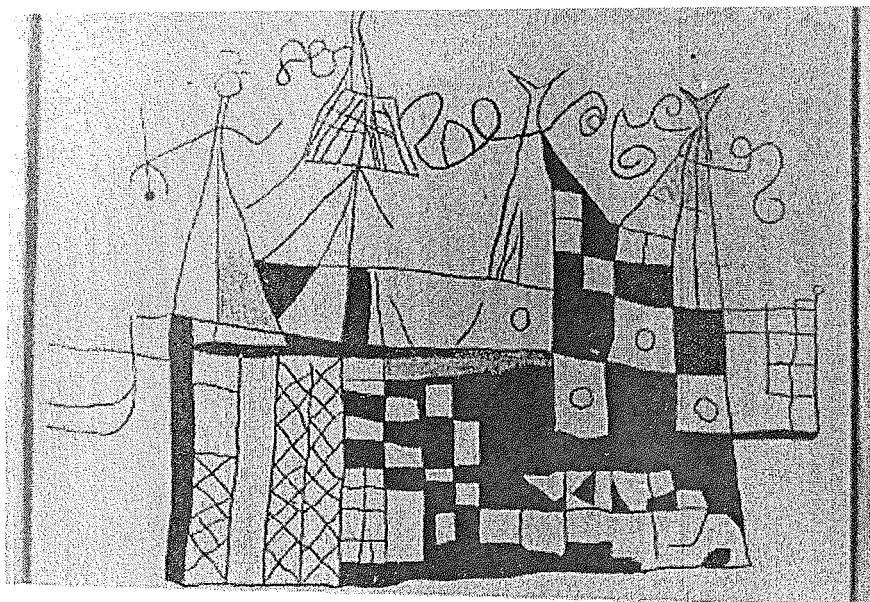


Fig.40

Theo Schoon, Copy of Maori Rock Drawing,
Carters Farm, Opihi,
South Island (S110.7).
Collection of Canterbury Museum.

S102/7. Carter's Opihi.

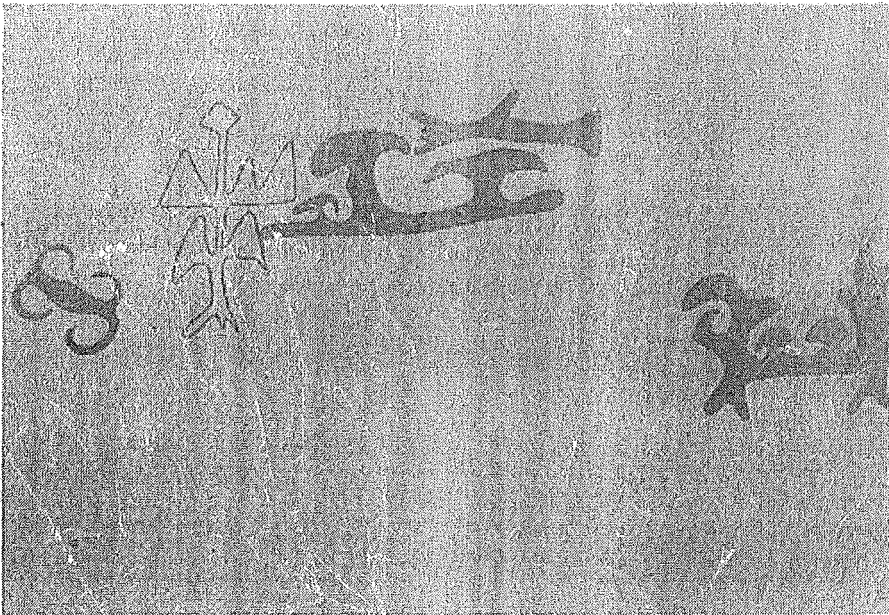


Fig.41

Theo Schoon, copy of Maori Rock drawing Tinkler, Takiroa (S127.2). Collection of Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

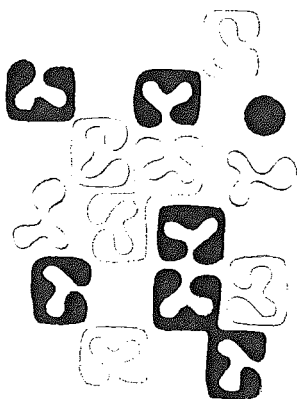


Fig.42

Theo Schoon, untitled (1963). Ink on paper, 28x22cm. Private Collection.



Fig.43

Theo Schoon, *Manaia Forms* (1965) Colour lithograph. Inscribed: "Printed by Theo Schoon in Hos' Studio, Northcote, Auckland." Signed by Kees Hos. 560x408mm. Collection of Kees Hos, Melbourne.

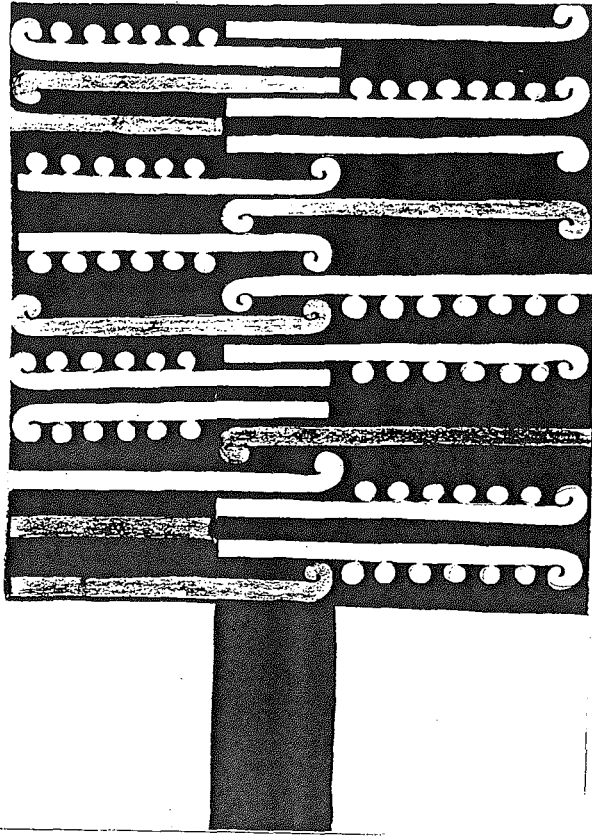


Fig.44

Gordon Walters, *Koru* (c.1960).
Indian ink and crayon drawing,
37.2x26.4cm. Sauerbier Collection.

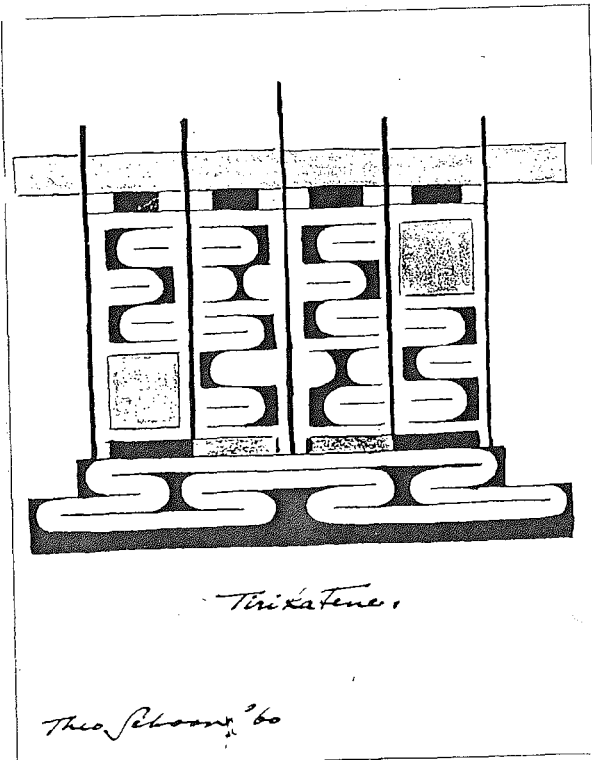


Fig.45

Theo Schoon, *Tirikatene* (1960).
Indian ink and crayon drawing.
Title inscribed, signed and dated.
27.5x20.2cm. Saubier Collection.

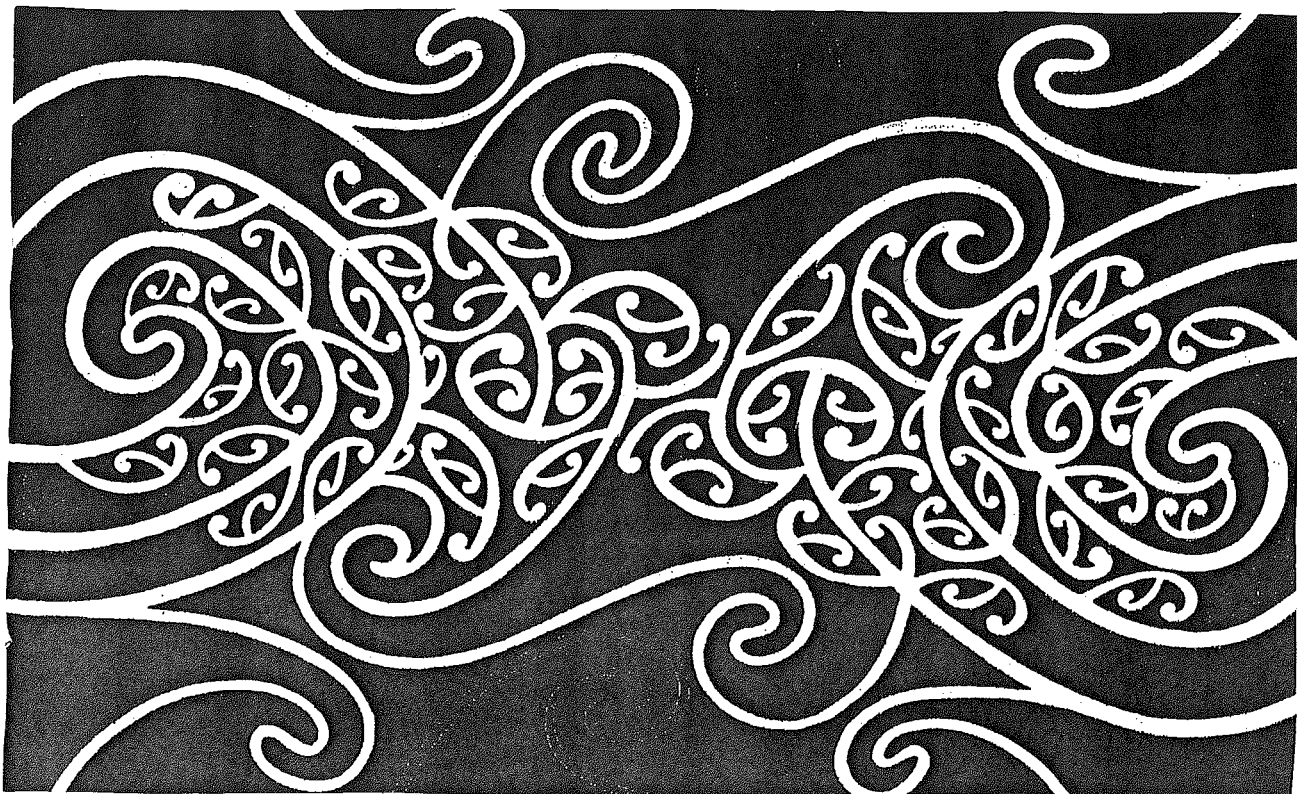


Fig.46 Theo Schoon, *Untitled (Polynesian Abstract)* (1965). Screenprint. 46.5x53cm. Collection of Jenny Gibbs, Auckland.

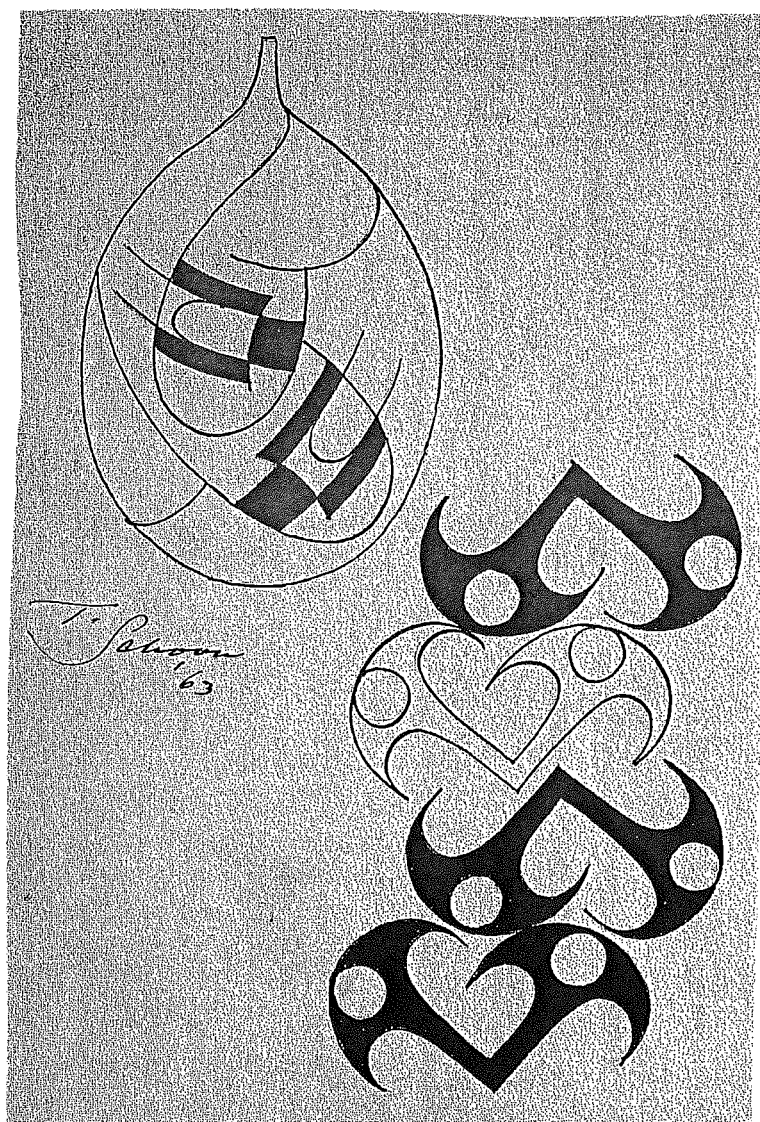


Fig.47 Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (1963). Ink on Paper. 28.5x220mm. Private Collection.

Fig.48 Theo Schoon, *untitled* (1964). Ink on paper. 20.5x17.2cm. Private Collection.

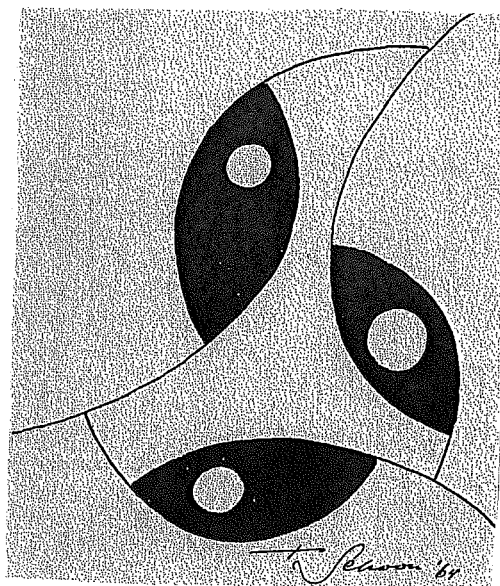




Fig.49

Theo Schoon, untitled (c.1967).
Colour cibachrome photograph,
37x36.5cm. Private Collection.

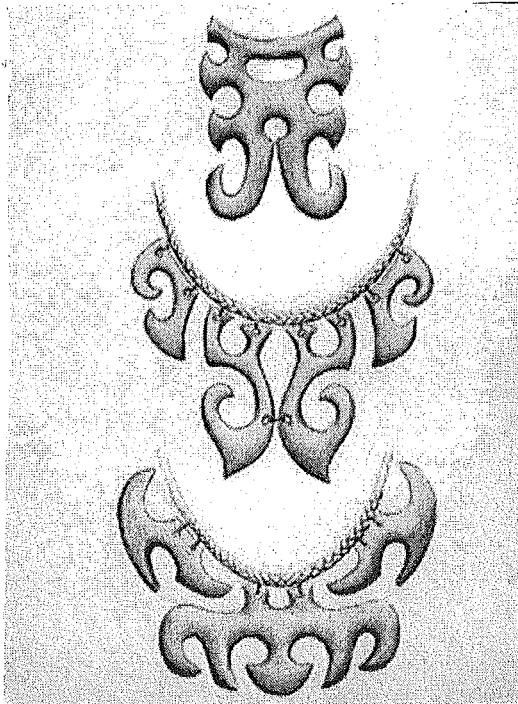


Fig.50

Theo Schoon, untitled (c.1971).
Designs for pounamu carving.
Coloured pencil drawing,
26x19.7cm. Private Collection.

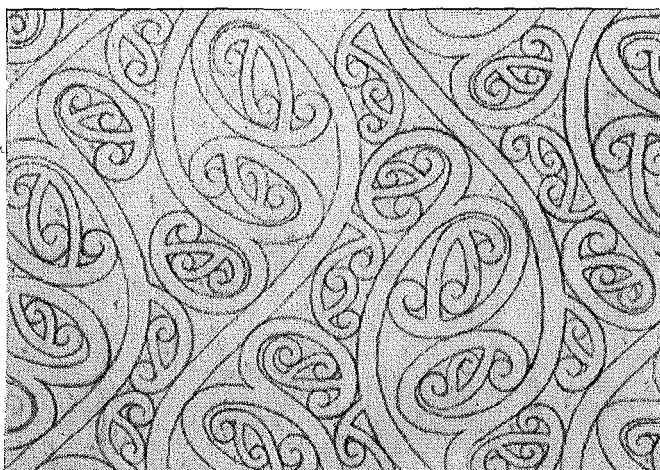


Fig.51

Theo Schoon, untitled (kowhaiwhai
patterns) (c.1957). Pencil drawing,
50x75cm. Private Collection.

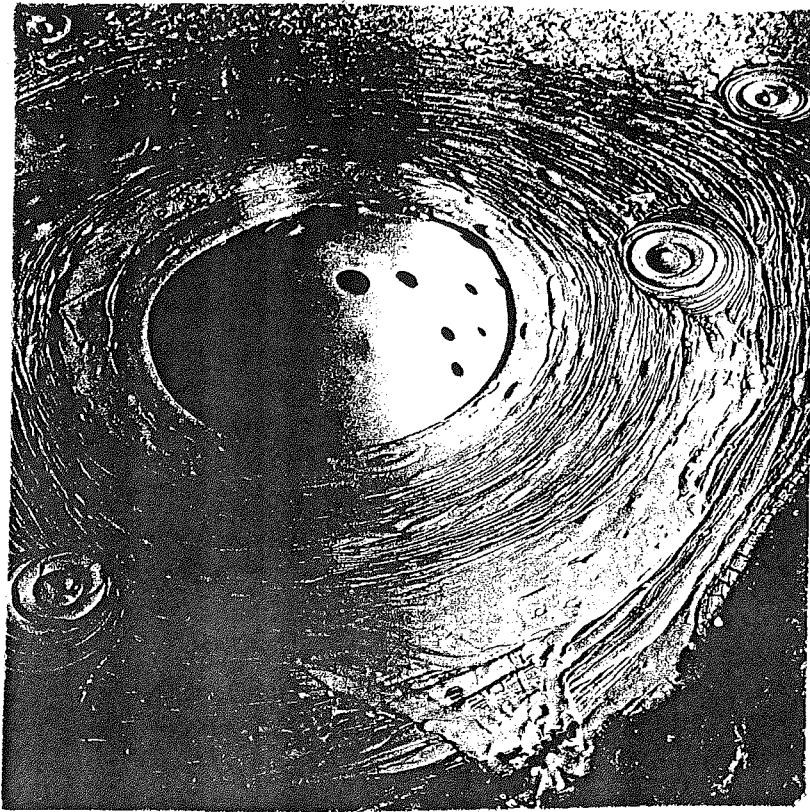


Fig.52

Theo Schoon, *Mud Pool Photograph*.
Date unknown. Gelatin silver print.
220x254mm. Saubier Collection.

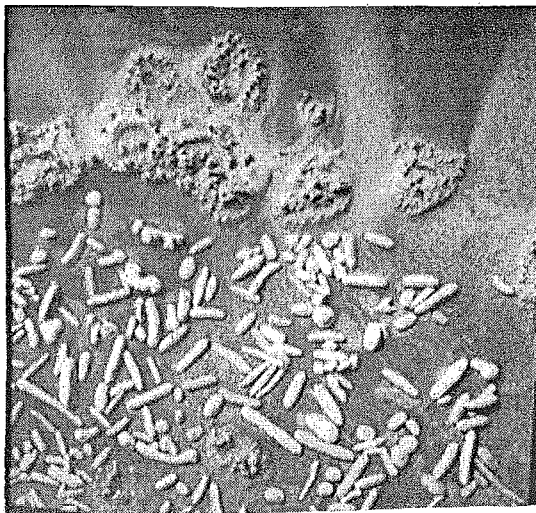


Fig.53

Theo Schoon, *Silica-Coated and Fossilised
Debris, Waiotapu* (c.1968).
Cibachrome photograph. 395x395mm.
Private Collection

Fig.54

Theo Schoon, *Untitled* (c.1965).
B&w photograph.
248x185mm. Private Collection.





Fig.55

Theo Schoon, *Mud Pool*
Photograph with Carved Mask
 (date unknown). 30.4x25cm.
 Saubier Collection.

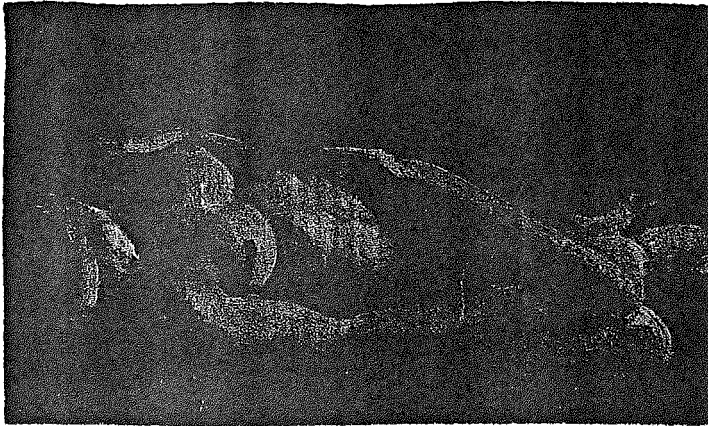


Fig.56

Theo Schoon, *Reclining Nude*
 (1982). Oil on canvas 50x83cm.
 Private Collection.

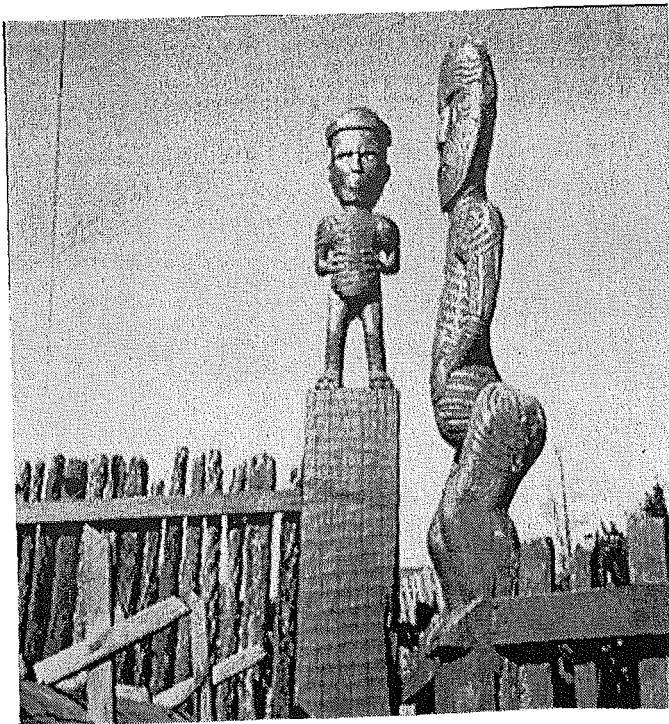


Fig.57

Theo Schoon, *Whakare Warewa, Rororua*
 (c.1965). B&w photograph.
 200x198mm. Private Collection.

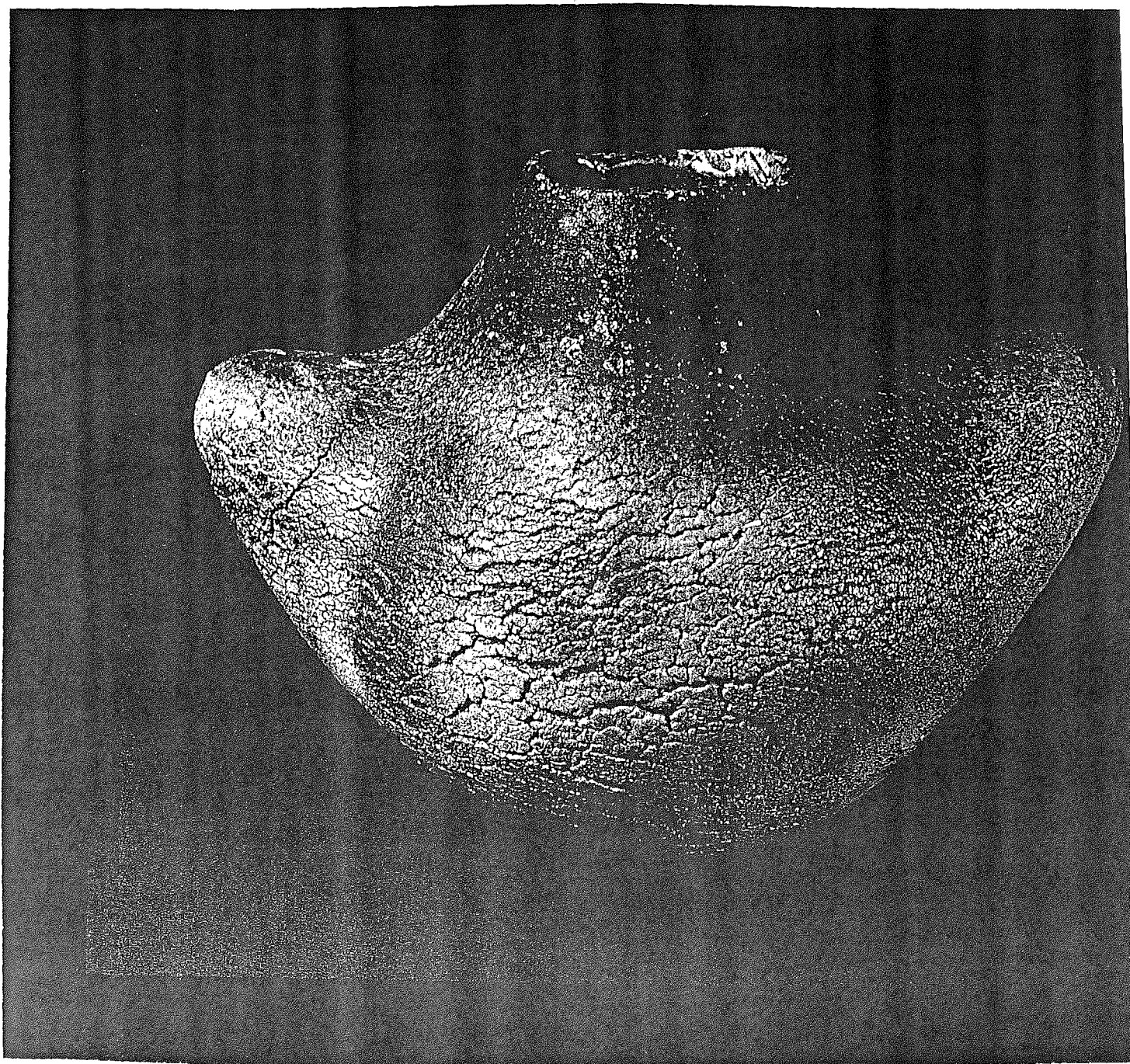


Fig.58 Len Castle, Stoneware vase after Schoon design.

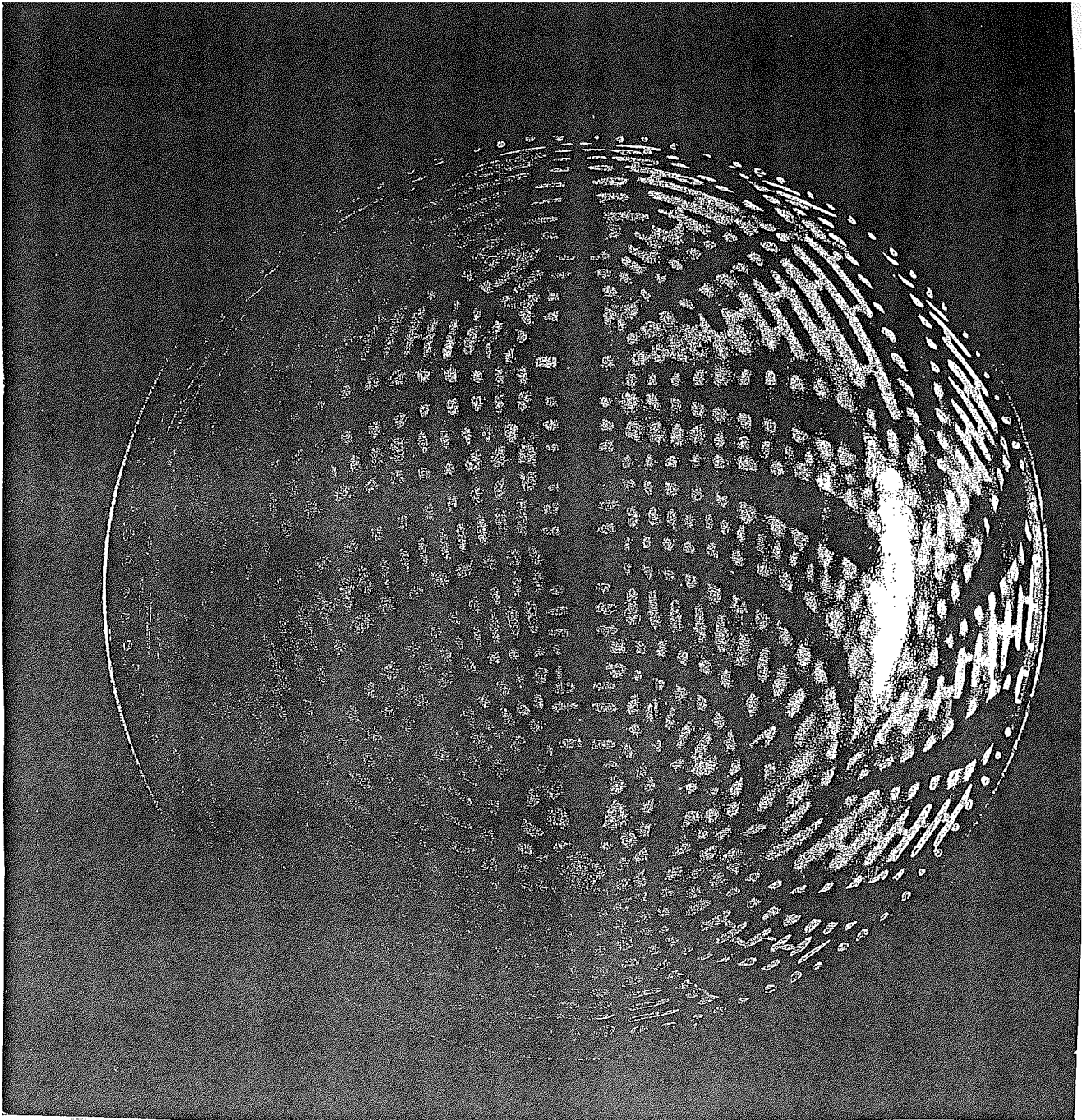


Fig.59 Len Castle, Stoneware bowl decorated by Schoon.

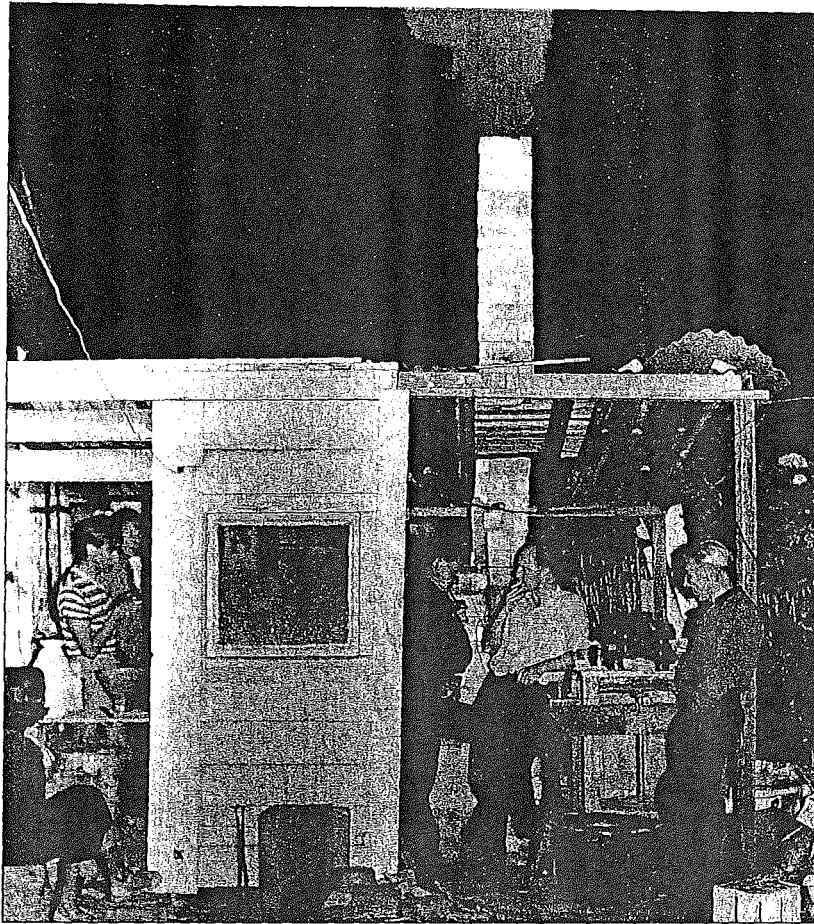


Fig.60

Steve Rumsey, kiln firing at Barry Brickell's house, Tui Street, Auckland (1957)

APPENDIX 1

SELECTIVE LIST OF ARTICLES ON MĀORI ROCK ART PUBLISHED IN NEW ZEALAND 1947–1949

(Prepared by Elana Frovola of the University of Canterbury Library)

"Ancient Rock Drawings Found in Southland." *Southland Times*, 10 Jan 1948.

"Early Rock Treasures." *Southern Cross*, 5 Feb 1949.

"Maori Rock Drawing in Caves." *The Press*, 14 Feb 1948.

"More about those Rock Drawings." *New Zealand Listener*, 18 April 1947.

"New Zealand Rock Drawing." *The Press*, 24 May 1947.

"Rock Drawing Reassessed." *The Press*, 10 May 1947.

"Rock Drawing." *Marlborough Express*, 20 May 1947.

"Rock Drawings." *The Press*, 12 June 1947.

"Visit by Dutch Artist." *Southland Times*, 20 Dec 1947.

Phillipps, W. J., 1947. "The Rua Hoata Shelter, Waikato River." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 56, 4.

Phillipps, W. J., 1948. "A Sacred Stone on Namu Pa, Opunaki." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 57, 2.

Schoon, T., 1947. "New Zealand's Oldest Art Galleries." *New Zealand Listener*, 12 Sept.

Taylor, W. A. 1949. *Pictographs and Moa Hunters*. Christchurch: Ellesmere Guardian.

APPENDIX 2

THE LIFE OF THEO SCHOON: A CHRONOLOGY

Based on S. Rumsey, "Theo Schoon: A Chronology", *Modern New Zealand* 8, 1995.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1915 | (31 July) Theodorus Johannes Schoon born in Kebumen, Java. |
| 1916 | First World War ends. |
| 1927–1930 | Receives secondary education in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. |
| 1931–1935 | Studies at Academie van Beeldende Kunsten en Technische in Rotterdam. Visits France and Switzerland. |
| 1936–1938 | Returns to Java and establishes own studio in Bandung, Central Java. Works on tourist publicity for Dutch shipping line KPM. |
| 1939–1940 | Second World War begins. Schoon family flees Java for Christchurch, New Zealand. Schoon enrolls at Canterbury School of Art and meets Rita Angus. (May 1940) Rotterdam bombed by the German Luftwaffe. |
| 1941–1945 | Schoon moves to Wellington and meets Gordon Walters and Dennis Knight Turner. He works as a street photographer. |
| 1945 | Second World War ends. Travels to Dunedin to meet parents who have recently been released from a Japanese POW camp in Java. First encounters Māori rock art in Otago Museum. Begins exploration of South Canterbury for rock drawings. Makes first approach to Roger Duff, Director of Canterbury Museum, Christchurch. |
| 1946 | Employed by the Department of Internal Affairs to make records of rock drawings. Begins field work. |
| 1947 | (2 June) Initiates correspondence with A. R. D. Fairburn. |
| 1949 | (Sept–Nov) Schoon works for a few months as a nurse at Avondale Mental Hospital. Encounters patient Rolfe Hattaway. Dismissed for giving art materials to patients. |
| 1950 | Successfully explores Waikato region for rock drawings. Goes to Rotorua and works as a gardener. Takes first geothermal |

- photographs. Constructs sculpture mobile from debris collected from below Huka Falls. Indonesia declares independence.
- 1951 Living in forestry camp near Rotorua.
- 1952 Working as farm staff at Mount Albert Plant Reserve Station. Meets Steve Rumsey. Exhibition of geothermal photographs at Auckland City Art Gallery planned but aborted.
- 1953 Schoon's father dies in January. Schoon becomes interested in gourd carving. Travels New Zealand photographing Lindauer paintings for their depiction of moko and gourds. At this stage he is living in the basement of 5 Grafton Rd. Auckland. Makes first approach to Len Castle. They begin to collaborate.
- 1956 Moves into 12 Home St.
- 1957–1958 Begins growing gourds. Schoon informs then-Prime Minister Walter Nash by letter, that he believed dedicated full-time artists should not have to pay tax and that he, for one, had no intention of paying any. This resulted in his prompt two week detention at Her Majesty's Pleasure in Mount Eden Prison.
- 1959 Meets Kees and Tina Hos when they open the New Vision shop in His Majesty's Arcade. Schoon was selling his carved gourds there at the time. He participates in the *Three Cave Artists* exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery in February.
- 1961 He spends time with Pine Taiapa, and meets Tony Fomison in Auckland.
- 1962 He takes up printing in collaboration with Kees Hos. Fomison curates an exhibition of Schoon's rock drawings in Wellington.
- 1963–1964 Begins working toward a major exhibition, encouraged by Kees and Tina Hos. Participates as the only European at a Māori art festival at Koroki's residence.
- 1965 (25 March) New Vision Gallery Opening Exhibition. Schoon exhibits along with Alison Duff (Roger Duff's sister), Eric Lee-Johnson, Toss Woollaston, Philip Trusttum, Nelson Thompson, Louise Henderson, Alison Pickmere (née Bond) and Pete Smith. (11–12 April) Solo exhibition at New Vision. Reviews favourable, but no sales. He is not accepted for the Auckland

- City Art Gallery exhibition *New Zealand Painting 1965*. Gives up painting and print-making, and considers leaving New Zealand. He applies unsuccessfully for a USA entry visa, and moves to Rotorua.
- 1966 Exhibits with McCahon and others at *The Ninth New Zealand Art Exhibition* in Dunedin, with little positive response. Continues to develop geothermal photography. Schoon begins corresponding with the weaver Francesca Mayer, living in Huancayo, Peru, who was associated with the American Peace Corps' global programme for the revival of indigenous crafts.
- 1967 Temporarily works as photographer and illustrator for the Forest Research Institute, Rotorua.
- 1968 Begins carving Pounamu, initially basing his designs on Māori pekapeka, fish-hook and koru motifs. Some of his geothermal photographs are selected for display in the New Zealand pavilion at the Tokyo Expo 1970.
- 1969 Starts work at the Westland Greenstone company, Hokitika, as a carver. He is befriended by Hettie Sawyer of Hettie's Rock Shop, Christchurch.
- 1970 Exhibits pounamu carvings at the New Vision gallery's jewellery exhibition (15–28 March), coinciding with the Auckland Arts Festival.
- 1971 Returns to Hokitika and works at the Sea View Mental Hospital. Later works as a scrub cutter, injuring his hands to the point where he is unable to draw or write.
- 1972 Moves to Australia and lives at 50 Victoria St, Paddington, Sydney.
- 1973 Lives with Brent Hesselyn at 1/25 Dolphin St, Coogee, Sydney. He spends a few weeks in gaol for traffic offences relating to his motor scooter.
- 1974 Evicted from Dolphin St. for rent arrears and moves into Randwick hostel for the elderly in return for gardening work. Asked to leave for neglecting his duties. Moves to a squat at 104

Stanley St, Sydney East where he is robbed of nearly everything he owns.

- 1975 Schoon's mother dies in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Schoon visits Bali on the inheritance. Returns to Australia and lives in a commune in Kempsey, New South Wales. Makes several visits to Bali and sponsors the training of three young Balinese dancers. Spends time incarcerated in an Indonesian prison.
- 1983 Returns to New Zealand to visit his brother hospitalised in Dunedin.
- 1983–1984 Stays with Helen Mason at Tokomaru Bay and then Northcote, Auckland. He is seriously disabled by his emphysema. Collaborates with Steve Rumsey using plaster stamps created with Len Castle.
- 1985 Decides to return to Australia. Stays for a while with Fomison at Chamberlain St, Grey Lynn, Auckland. Dies in Sydney, 14 July.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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